

The local government digitalisation almanac

A simple guide
for local councils

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This document can be accessed at www.local.gov.uk/cyberdigital/almanac. Visit our [dedicated webpages](#) for more details about our support offer for councils on ways to improve the secure use of digital technology.

Introduction

Overview

Welcome to the LGA's Local Government Digitalisation Almanac: A Simple Guide for Local Councils. Our goal in producing this guide is to make the topic of local government digitalisation more accessible and understandable to a wide range of users from all backgrounds. The guide contains simple steps, practical examples and recommended reading to support councils as they push forwards with the 12 critical goals of digitalisation agreed by the LGA, the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers (Solace) and the Society for Innovation, Technology and Modernisation (Socitm). It is not intended to be an instruction manual, but a starting point for wider conversations and to further collaborative improvement efforts to help councils realise the full benefits of digitalisation for employees, residents, businesses and communities, regardless of where they are on the journey.

Background

In July 2022 The LGA launched a [new outcomes-based framework](#) for improving and supporting local government digitalisation programmes. This initial framework was intended to promote the use of a common language and shared strategic outcomes by local government when engaging with central government, private, voluntary and community sectors, as well as with one another.

The 12 strategic outcomes are connectivity, data, democracy and participation, economic productivity and growth, ethics and sustainability, inclusion, leadership, organisational capability, partnership, security and resilience, services, and value.

We see meeting these outcomes as crucial to councils delivering digitalisation ambitions that meet the needs of local communities. This Digitalisation Almanac expands on our early framework by exploring each outcome in more depth: what each outcome area means, the steps to take to understand more about each outcome, and notable examples from authorities to consider in one's own local context.

Methodology

The LGA commissioned PUBLIC in 2022 to lead the delivery of our Local Government Digitalisation Almanac. PUBLIC worked in collaboration with 26 councils and one combined authority, as well as with 18 digital and data experts (see Annex A). PUBLIC selected examples of notable practice from 34 councils in England and Wales that had – or was anticipated to – lead to good outcomes. In selecting these examples, PUBLIC considered existing published case studies that they or their contributors viewed to be original, creative and/or effective approaches to achieving one or more of the 12 digitalisation outcomes (see Annex B). The list is not intended to be exhaustive.



Connectivity

Outcome:

The council supports residents, businesses and its staff to access the internet and council services wherever they are in the community.

What we mean by connectivity

Digital connectivity underpins all other digital services in a council. The government is putting a lot of emphasis on transforming digital connectivity across the UK. Known as the [Digital Switchover](#), analogue lines will be replaced and upgraded to digital internet-based infrastructure by 2025. Currently, [70 per cent of the UK has gigabit-capable broadband](#) and 92 per cent of the UK's landmass can access 4G, and the UK government aims to increase this 85 per cent gigabit-capable broadband coverage and 95 per cent by 2025. But there are still many areas across the country, especially smaller, rural and more remote councils that struggle with connectivity. Improving broadband and mobile connectivity is an important strategic priority for councils.

Ways of understanding connectivity needs

Understand what it is and the benefits it can bring

A local area can only take full advantage of connectivity if a council and its residents understand its benefits. Not only does better connectivity enable key day-to-day services, it also brings key socio-economic benefits like reduced energy consumption, increased efficiency through remote working opportunities, and a boosted local economy by helping businesses operate online (see [Essex County Council's Digital Strategy](#) for a more detailed breakdown).

Educate yourself and residents

A good understanding of the basics of connectivity can help make the case for better connectivity in a local area. For example, if residents ask about high [mobile masts](#), this can be better explained by a better understanding of what they are and why they are needed. Consult the LGA's [Councillor's guide to digital connectivity](#) to understand a council's role and the LGA's ['What is mobile connectivity?'](#) guide for mobiles. Use [MobileUK's 5G toolkit](#) to address questions or misconceptions about 5G.

Understand connectivity speeds

The [Universal Service Obligation \(USO\)](#) – the national standard on connectivity speeds – states that every home and business in the UK has a legal right to request a decent broadband connection (10Mbps).

Broadband	Decent	Download speeds up to 10Mbps. Upload speeds of up to 1Mbps
	Superfast	Download speeds up to 30 Mbps. Upload speeds up to 10 Mbps
	Ultrafast	Download speeds of up to 300 Mbps. Upload speeds up to 21 Mbps
	Gigabit broadband	Download speeds of up to 1 Gbit/s with similar upload speeds
Mobile	4G	Fourth generation mobile networks. Average speeds of 25-35 Mbps
	5G	Fifth generation mobile networks. Average speeds of 150-200 Mbps

Table showing different broadband and mobile speeds. *Download speed refers to the speed at which an internet connection is able to retrieve data from the internet. Upload speed is the speed that an internet connection can allow data to be sent from a device to the internet.

Understand speed classifications

Below is a breakdown of some of the speeds needed by council and residents to be able to complete basic daily activities.

Use	Activity	Decent	Superfast	Ultrafast	Gigabit
In council building	Checking emails Delivering services (such as downloading data) Multidisciplinary team meetings	Amber	Green	Green	Green
	Supporting more than 10 employees Providing council services online (online meetings, care services)	Red	Amber	Green	Green
In your home	Checking emails Accessing council services	Amber	Green	Green	Green
	Backing up to the cloud/uploading files Making video calls Supporting more than 4 devices	Amber	Amber	Green	Green
	Checking emails	Amber	Green	Green	Green
On the move	Downloading files or images Making video calls Accessing council services	Red	Green	Green	Green

Table showing what broadband speeds are needed for different activities in a council building, in your home and on the move. This table uses traffic light colours to highlight internet speeds, red being insufficient, amber being sufficient and green being more than sufficient.

Understand current coverage

To get more out of digital connectivity interventions, and create an internal business case for improving connectivity, it is important to understand current coverage. Consult [Ofcom's Connected Nations](#) map of mobile and broadband and [thinkbroadband's](#) map of Superfast and Fibre broadband for fixed broadband. For mobile coverage, use [3](#), [O2](#), [EE](#) and [Vodafone's](#) tools. However, these tools only provide a general guide and are not always accurate. Ideally, if the resources are available, test coverage by working with an external, independent assessor.

Speak to local citizens and teams

It is important to speak directly with residents to understand their experience of connectivity, especially in rural or remote areas. This includes consulting with partners with local expertise and who have lived experience of connectivity speeds and performance. Internally, this could be teams working with frontline connectivity requirements, like housing, highways and planning. Externally, talk to associations or community groups like [Adept Digital Connectivity Working Group](#).

Ways of investing in connectivity

Invest in a Digital Champion

Less than [a third of councils](#) have assigned Digital Champions, but they can be beneficial for rolling out fixed and mobile connectivity. They act as the single point of contact for network providers, and are responsible for scouting out funding opportunities, reducing barriers in the deployment process and resolving connectivity queries. See [MobileUK's report on the benefits of Digital Champions](#) and advice on implementation, and also [Essex County Council's Broadband Champion Toolkit](#).

Explore national funding schemes

Improving connectivity is an expensive and complex undertaking, especially for hard-to-reach areas. Consider looking at support from different funding opportunities to support. Consult the Department for Culture, Media and Sport's (DCMS) [Building Digital UK](#) website to stay up to date with opportunities.

For fixed broadband: see [Project Gigabit](#) – a £5bn, national mission consisting of a [Gigabit voucher scheme](#) for businesses in rural areas, and [GigaHubs](#) to connect public sector buildings to fast and reliable broadband. See [DCMS' Project GigaHubs toolkit](#) for practical advice for councils. For Welsh councils: the [Local Broadband Fund](#) supports local authorities and social enterprises to deliver broadband projects, and [Access Broadband Cymru Scheme](#) provides grants to fund installation costs of new broadband connections for homes and businesses in Wales. The [Public Sector Broadband Aggregation](#) connects Welsh public sector organisations to a private, secure, Wide Area Network (WAN). For mobile connectivity: the [Shared Rural Network \(SRN\)](#) led by EE, O2, Three and Vodafone will help get 4G mobile broadband to 95 per cent of the UK by 2025.

What tools and resources are available?

Digital and Telecom

- Navigating agreements with network providers on broadband and mobile coverage can be difficult. Consult GOV.UK's [Digital and Telecom resources](#) which cover legislation, regulation, planning, public assets and deployment.

Fixed broadband

- Westminster City Council's [Digital Connectivity Toolkit](#) is a step-by-step guide on how to map, engage, intervene and test broadband connectivity.
- LGA's [The role of a council](#) provides guidance on the rollout of superfast broadband infrastructure.
- The City of London's [Digital Infrastructure Toolkit](#) and [Standardised Wayleave Agreement](#) documents ways to navigate relationships with network providers. Also see GOV.UK's [Guidance on Access Agreements](#).
- [Street Works Toolkit](#) gives on advice for highway authorities on collaborating on fibre deployment.

Mobile

- [MobileUK's telecom's fact sheet](#) on mobile phone masts and why they're important.
- [Local Authority Checklist](#) on steps to improve mobile connectivity.

Connected Places

- Including Internet of Things (IoT), smart sensors and other connected places technologies, see the collection of [resources provided by the DCMS Secure Connected Places Team](#).

What have other councils done?

Organisation	Category	Summary
West Midlands 5G Wolverhampton Council	Connectivity Strategy	Wolverhampton Council, using government schemes and in partnership with West Midlands 5G, designed a Digital Infrastructure Strategy which outlines its cross-cutting approach to improving mobile and broadband connectivity. The strategy is led by a Digital Champion and Digital Infrastructure Coordinator, the council's point of contact for facilitating partnerships with network operators. It sets out a blueprint for digital infrastructure strategies and shows how to establish good partnerships inside and outside the council.
Dorset Council	Rural	Led by Dorset Council, 5G Rural Dorset is a £9m research project forwarded by a consortium of partners. Part-funded by DCMS' 5G Rural Testbed Trial, the project considers how 5G can be used to improve connectivity in rural areas. Dorset faced poor connectivity along the coast, which was hampering emergency responses. 5G was used on Surf Condition Monitoring (SCM) buoys to monitor sea states 24/7. Data was shared with emergency services and the public. This serves as a blueprint for rural 5G implementation use cases.
Nottinghamshire Council	Innovation	The Nottinghamshire 10 Year Plan outlines how the Digital Connectivity Team at Nottinghamshire County Council will provide 'outstanding' digital connectivity for the community. Where new digital infrastructure has been installed, over 75 per cent of premises have made the switch to high-speed internet access. The council is also ambitious for 5G deployment and extended mobile coverage in rural areas. 5G Connected Forest assessed the potential for 5G applications in the Sherwood Forest area. Delivering 5G connectivity to the forest helped push forward innovative 5G use cases – for visitor attractions, protecting the forest environment through robotic environmental management and providing the base for an innovation accelerator programme to allow 5G applications to be tested and commercialised.

How to start putting this ambition into practice

Building knowledge and skills about connectivity across the council

Ensure that council staff are aware of the benefits of better connectivity, and core connectivity requirements for council services and residents' needs.

Seek nominations from your IT team to act as a digital connectivity advocate and give them time to support colleagues and residents with queries.

Include impact assessments that examine mobile and fixed coverage needs as part of all of your major development and place-based projects.

Understanding current levels of access to internet and council services

Know what the fixed broadband and mobile coverage is in your council.

Engage with local residents and businesses to augment coverage data.

Develop your own coverage mapping tool, or work with other partners to do so.

Investing in connectivity infrastructure and new use cases

Work with network providers to install 4G and ultra-fast or gigabit broadband, led by your digital champion.

Develop template assets for connectivity projects in the council, including template contracts with external connectivity providers, to facilitate the rollout of connectivity infrastructure.

Test innovative connectivity use cases, such as 5G, IoT and Long Range Wide Area Network (LoRaWAN).



Data

Outcome:

The council's data practices use a set of standards focused on improving services and informing policy.

What we mean by data

Data is a critical asset for councils to drive better insights and decision-making and deliver more effective local services. Sometimes, data is collected because it is used for reporting and transparency purposes, perhaps mandated by central government. And other times it is collected as a product of operational service delivery, as part of the day-to-day running of the council. Councils can tie their data to decision-making by working toward more effective data collection, sharing, linking and maintenance.

What are a council's responsibilities?

Essential	Recommended
Legislation including General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) ; Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA) ; The Re-use of Public Information Regulation lays out requirements for local authorities regarding the use and re-use of public information. GDPR states that all local authorities must appoint a Data Protection Officer (DPO) responsible for the authority's compliance with data protection legislation.	Guidance for compliant data use including LGA GDPR Guidance , LGA Information Sharing Data Standards , LGA Local Transparency Code Guidance on what to consider when publishing data (see Manchester City Council as an example). The Government's National Data Strategy explores the direction of data access, stewardships and usage in the UK; and discussions of the creation of an Office for Local Government which will review all existing local government data across England on education, recycling, adult social care, and climate change to assess performance.

Ways of collecting and organising data

Identify use cases

Figuring out the data available, and transforming it into a usable format, is a significant challenge for a council. Identify use cases where better data could help, then identify the data assets needed to deliver on that use case.

Examples of data sources

Administrative/Operational	Council processes Personal Business
Service Delivery Information	Web Sensors Citizen-generated / crowdsourced Partners (policing, housing, charities etc.)
Free or commercial sources	Official statistics Council assets Surveys (in-house or external)

Examples of using data

Monitoring and measuring	Key performance indicators Management information reporting
Transparency and citizen engagement	Open data portals Analytics hubs
Prediction (about individuals and services)	Fire risk Children social care risk assessments Education completion
Case management	Case profiles in children's and adults' social care
Town planning	Traffic flow to plan provision (for example roads, pavements and cycle paths)
Resource optimisation	Connected Places / Smart Cities Planning
Detecting fraud and errors	Detecting unusual buying patterns in procurement processes
Automating decisions	Waste management scheduling (for example smart bins)
Modelling impact of changes	Predicting outcomes for service users

Create a data registry

A directory or register of data assets is useful in helping to identify data requirements or gaps for the above use cases. If there isn't one, look across different council systems where data is being collected (such as case management systems, CRM systems, procurement and finance systems), and work with service owners to categorise the data into a central registry. For inspiration, consult [LG Inform's Inventories](#) and [Datasets](#) that point to data that local councils publish, and [Data.gov.uk](#) to find local government data for building products and services.

Follow basic standards

- Know who your DPO is and escalate to them all [Data Protection Requests](#).
- When recording location data, use Unique Property Reference Numbers (UPRNs)/ Unique Street Reference Numbers (USRNs). See the LGA's [Guidance on using UPRN/USRN](#) including a [UPRN Assessment tool](#) to see how integrated your systems are.
- When recording data about a resource or thing use [Universal Resource Identifiers \(URIs\)](#). See the LGA's [Local Government Functions List](#) and [Local Government Service List](#) giving a URI to each type of function or service that local authorities provide.
- Any text you publish should be in [HTML](#) format.
- Any data you publish should follow an existing data format, such as [consistent and standards-based comma-separated values \(CSV\)](#).
- Any open data you publish should adopt Open Referral UK's [Open Standard](#) and use existing data languages (such as [RDF](#) or [SPARQL](#)).

Ways of making good use of data

Publish data in open formats

Many councils have taken steps to publish data in open formats (see [Bristol](#), [Leeds](#), [Trafford](#)). But it is not enough to just have open data; quality, reliability and accessibility are also required. See information on local government open data at [LG Inform](#) which encourages the publishing of data to common standards so it can easily be compared and combined.

For further advice see the LGA's [Local Transparency and Data and Transparency](#) pages and [Data Cymru](#). Data can only be properly used by platforms (such as [Data.Gov](#), [London Data store](#) and [Open Data Wales](#)) and tools (such as [LG Inform Plus](#)) when it is produced to common standards that are linkable (for example through URIs). Wherever data is published, give relevant contact details to help with any further enquiries.

Use data to assess performance

Use benchmarking tools to assess data maturity. The [Local Authority Interactive Tool \(LAIT\)](#) draws together public data on children's services; the [Data Maturity Self-Assessment Model](#) measures levels of data management, governance and openness. [Nesta and the LGA's Matrix](#) outlines notable practice; and the [Subnational Indicators Explorer](#) compares a local authority and the UK average local authority using different indicators.

Networks and tools to consult

- [The Knowledge Hub, GDPR in Local Government Group](#) and [iStandUK](#) which promote data standards for efficiency and transformation of public services.
- [Advanced and Predictive Analytics Network in Local Government](#) which is a group for data analysts to share intelligence and transparency on the use of algorithms and predictive analytics.
- ODI's [Open Data Leaders Network](#).
- The Chief Data Officer Network which promotes data leadership across local government.
- Courses on data such as the LGA's [Making Local Authority Data Work For You](#).
- The LGA's [Performance Management Guide](#) on how to present data.
- iStand UK's [Local Public Services Data Handling Guidelines](#).

What have other councils done?

Organisation	Category	Summary
Coventry Council	Benchmarking	Coventry City Council uses LG Inform Plus to benchmark its activity and metrics against other authorities. Previously, the council collected this information in a 100-page data book (that few people read). LG Inform Plus allowed the council to bring together a range of information to produce shorter profiles about different parts of the city in a more user-friendly way. The council has used the comparators to produce the One Coventry Plan and the Coventry City Annual Performance Report. The platform has allowed the council to respond to fresh issues and enrich the data it holds about local people and places within a Citywide Intelligence Hub .
Thurrock Council	Data Linking	Thurrock Council created a Single View of Debt and Vulnerability Service which brings information together from across its services to create a complete view of Thurrock's residents' debts. The platform extracts pseudonymised data which is then shared, matched, enriched and modelled. This allows Thurrock to find a way to share data ethically and proportionately between services that could then be operationally deployed.
Tameside Council	Data Standards	SAVVI , 'a Scalable Approach to Vulnerability via Interoperability', is a programme hosted by Tameside Council , funded by Local Digital. It aims to provide common data standards and models for data sharing, and information governance, via the SAVVI model process for local authorities. The model will be applied to find, assess, and support people over a wide range of vulnerability themes. SAVVI has also developed an Information Governance Framework setting out the steps to legally and ethically share data, for secondary use.

How to start putting this ambition into practice

Developing robust approaches to data security and data protection

Comply with the Data Protection Act 2018 and the Re-use of Public Information Regulation

Know who your DPO is and escalate to them any data protection requests.

Follow or create a data ethics framework to ensure you use data ethically and responsibly.

Working toward more efficient and effective data practices in your council

Follow national standards when recording commonly used data, such as addresses or names.

Use tools and systems for data cleaning and maintenance to ensure your data is of high-quality.

Use consistent formats and schema when publishing your council's data, and adopt common sectoral standards, such as iStand, for particular use cases.

Using and linking data to optimise policymaking and service innovation

Make use of open data to foster transparency, innovation, collaboration and promote greater efficiencies.

Analyse your data to inform decision-making, target or forecast interventions and improve services, including linking relevant datasets across service areas.

Invest in advanced data capabilities like predictive analytics and its supporting technology.



Democracy and participation

Outcome:

The council makes maximum use of digital technology to support councillor attendance, improve transparency, optimise democratic decision-making, and increase community engagement and collaboration.

What we mean by democracy and participation

Councils engage citizens on everyday matters they are actively invested in, and are increasingly turning to digital tools to achieve this. Digital democracy provides a set of tools and methods for running the democratic processes of a council, collaborating with residents and building a more responsive infrastructure. Councils can use these tools to optimise community engagement, internal democratic and decision-making processes.

What are the regulations on remote and hybrid meetings?

Understand the legislation

Remote meetings are integral to digital democracy. There are clear benefits to holding remote meetings (see the [LGA's temperature check on remote meetings](#)) for councillors and residents, like reducing travel costs, having better accessibility for disabled councillors, increasing participation and enabling a better work-life balance. However, the legislation around remote council meetings since the pandemic has been challenging to navigate. Know that:

- For councils in England, [legislation for remote council meetings has not been made permanent](#) following its expiration in May 2021.
- For councils in Wales, [The Local Government and Elections \(Wales\) Act 2021](#) outlines the legal basis for multi-location meetings, including in remote and hybrid settings. These councils must also comply with the [Interim Statutory Guidance on Multi Location Meetings](#).

Consider the exceptions

There is some flexibility for English authorities; these councils can broadcast physical meetings online. Some authorities such as [Birmingham Council](#) have invested in technology to live-stream meetings, but any meeting convened under the [Local Government Act 1972](#) must take place in-person for vote casting. Decisions cannot be made in meetings convened entirely remotely. See the [Centre for Governance and Scrutiny](#) for more guidance on navigating legislation on council meetings.

Ways of making the most of online and hybrid meetings

In a hybrid meeting model, councillors and officers have the choice to participate in-person or virtually, and Democratic Services Officers have been considering how best to do this since the pandemic. Here is some useful guidance:

- The LGA's [considerations for hybrid working](#) as guiding principles to follow.
- The University of Cambridge [guide to online meetings](#) for meeting chairs, attendees and organisers.
- Glasgow City Council's [guide on how to use Microsoft Teams](#), one of the most popular digital platforms for councils.
- Digital Dorset's [YouTube tutorial on using Teams](#) across local government and providing more of a deep-dive.
- The London Office of Technology & Innovation's (LOTI) step-by-step guide on [how to make meetings accessible](#) to the public.
- Guidance on live-streaming meetings from [Microsoft Teams](#) and [Zoom](#).

What are good engagement principles?

Establishing good [community engagement](#) is vital for building partnerships with residents. Start by establishing internal support for digital democracy from policymakers, leadership and communication teams and commit to responding to community feedback. When looking to digital tools to support democratic engagement, these principles can be followed:

Clarify your goals

Have clear goals in mind before planning a community engagement approach. In particular, ask: What problem are you solving? Who are you trying to reach? What's the subject, for instance, community ideation, resource allocation or voting on different options? Which groups do you need to hear from? Having clear objectives will help avoid the trap of engaging for engagement's sake.

Consult external resources

CitizenLab's [guide to digital community engagement](#) provides a roadmap for councils. LOTI has developed guidance on [using digital tools to engage residents](#). The [LGA guide to engagement](#) and [Councillor workbook: neighbourhood and community engagement](#) provide advice on building stronger relationships between councils and residents. For Welsh councillors, see the [Welsh government communications guide](#). Beyond the UK, the [Observatory of Public Sector Innovation Case Study Library](#) has examples of cities using technology to engage their residents.

Consider your resources

Community engagement for district and county councils will differ. Community engagement tools range from pulse surveys or forms to sophisticated idea management platforms and detailed data analytics. Having realistic expectations of what can be done with what you have will set you on the right path.

Combine online and offline methods

Remember that digital technology is not a silver bullet. Digital tools should be used in combination with existing measures such as [online and hybrid meetings](#) to encourage greater participation. If sending out a pulse survey on a planning project, provide analogue alternatives to receive comprehensive resident feedback and ensure everyone is heard.

What tools and resources are available?

Councils are using a range of digital tools to improve democratic engagement. These include:

- **Pulse surveys** to identify important issues for the council and community (see [Southend on Sea](#), [Enfield](#), and [Falkirk Council](#)). These are an easy, accessible way to gather feedback, reduce data collection costs, and measure performance.
- **Remote meetings** to support councillor and public attendance and share minutes transparently with the public (see [Epsom and Ewell](#)). These help to reduce travel costs, support members with caring responsibilities, and promote inclusive engagement. See the LGA's [Online and Hybrid Meetings](#) page for case studies.
- **Participatory budgeting** to improve citizen participation in funding allocation, and ensure monitoring following budget allocation. See Tower Hamlets' [You Decide](#), or Govanhill's [Equally Well](#) initiatives as good indicative examples.
- **Community engagement tools** to reach wide and diverse audiences through digital platforms, increase responsiveness, and crowdsource ideas.

What have other councils done?

Organisation	Summary
Barking and Dagenham Council	<p>Barking and Dagenham has created the Citizens' Alliance Network, a portal to post active projects the council is working on and invitations for residents to get involved. For example, the council has a budget for improving housing estates and residents can use the portal to pin ideas on a central map. This promotes interactive and direct resident feedback on planning projects.</p>
Newham Council	<p>Newham Council, in response to the pandemic, launched the Co-Create Platform to help widen community assembly participation. It recognised that not all residents have the digital skills or devices to engage with the platform. In response, the council held digital workshops in some communities, providing the skills and devices for all to engage, demonstrating its commitment to building inclusive democratic services.</p>
Cardiff Council	<p>Cardiff Council has produced guidance on the Multi-Location Meetings Policy, covering transparency, accessibility, good conduct and the Welsh language. It provides a useful blueprint for navigating remote meetings and making sure they best fit the council and the communities they serve.</p>
Kirklees Council	<p>Kirklees Council set up the Democracy Commission to gather evidence on and improve local democracy, highlighting active citizenship as a strategic priority in its 2017 'Growing a stronger local democracy, from the ground up' report. Kirklees now runs a series of community engagements blending online and offline methods. The How Good is Our Place campaign uses the Place Standard tool to discover what residents prioritise in their area, and encourage resident involvement. Residents can get involved online through surveys and in-person by talking to councillors.</p>

How to start putting this ambition into practice

Holding remote and hybrid meetings to improve attendance and transparency

Understand relevant regulations on remote meetings and follow key guidance including taking exemptions into consideration.

Conduct remote and hybrid meetings effectively via live-stream or video conferencing to support councillor attendance.

Share, record and make your council meetings accessible online to improve transparency.

Conducting community engagement

Adopt a user-centred community engagement approach with clear objectives.

Hold digital community engagement or consultation processes on key projects.

Combine offline and online methods in your community engagement.

Optimising democratic decision making through digital tools

Be aware of different digital engagement tools and know when best to use them.

Ensure that your website has an accessible, responsive online portal for resident communication.

Use more advanced citizen engagement tools, such as crowdsourced idea forums, and participatory budgeting to optimise democratic decision-making processes.



Economic productivity and growth

Outcome:

The council supports the use of digital technology by local businesses, partners and third sector organisations.

What we mean by economic productivity and growth

Digital technology can be a driver of productivity, both nationally and locally. To enable businesses and third sector organisations to benefit from this, councils can provide support by creating the necessary conditions for growth, including building the right infrastructure and developing digital skills.

Ways of supporting digital capability

Convene an advisory panel

Councils sit at the ideal place to drive more advanced digital capabilities in their local area, and by extension improve local productivity. One of the ways to do this is through [Local Skills Advisory Panels](#). These bring together local employers and skills providers to identify local skills priorities, helping industry recruit and retain a skilled workforce. Digital skills are an integral part of this.

Consider a partnership approach

Councils can play an active part by setting the agenda and ensuring that the provision of digital skills is aligned to current and future employer needs. [Local Enterprise Partnerships \(LEPs\)](#) – business-led partnerships between local authorities and private sector businesses – also provide opportunities to support digital skills through [Digital Skills Partnerships \(DSPs\)](#) which bring together public, private and charity sector organisations to address local skills across combined authorities in England.

Build talent through apprenticeships

Another way to support local businesses in their digital capability is through apprenticeships. This benefits councils by building internal talent (discussed in the Organisational Capability section) and supports local businesses in accessing digital talent. Through the apprenticeship levy, [councils can transfer 25 per cent of their annual apprenticeship levy funds to other organisations to help train apprentices](#). The [Education and Skills Funding Agency's Guide](#) outlines how you can do this.

Ways of creating the conditions for digital success

One of the most obvious ways councils can support local productivity is by improving digital infrastructure, as discussed in the Connectivity section. Another way is to support business/innovation hubs that provide the space, advice and support for businesses using digital technologies. This is important for start-ups and smaller organisations to get them off the ground, but it also allows more established businesses to stay local.

These arrangements go by many names: business hubs, digital hubs and technology incubators. Target this at technology businesses to stimulate growth in the tech sector.

Digital High Streets

TechUK's report on the [Technology and the Future of UK High Streets](#) states there are 50,000 fewer shops on high streets than ten years ago, and a 20 per cent fall in the number of visitors. High streets are integral to a local community's wellbeing and many councils see social and economic value in restoring them. This can be done with the help of digital technology.

The Government backed [Digital High Street Report 2020](#) made recommendations for local government including improving digital infrastructure, basic digital skills and sharing knowledge and innovative practices between authorities. These recommendations are even more relevant in a post-pandemic world. Councils can use digital technologies to improve public transport to make it easier for potential customers to check timetables and plan journeys. With improved connectivity, businesses can get themselves online so that customers can check when shops are open, what they offer and much more.

Ways of providing the right resources

Councils are ideally situated to provide businesses and third sector organisations with the tools and resources necessary for growth. Most councils will have a 'business' section on their website. What many are missing, however, is how businesses can best make use of digital technologies.

Create tailored advice, as in the case of Islington Council which created a series of videos with [practical tips on using digital technologies](#), or Hackney Council's guidance on [how to create a digital presence](#). Link to external resources like Lloyds Bank's [benchmark for the digitisation of UK small businesses](#), Google's toolkit on [how to increase business presence online](#) and the Superfast Wales [digital toolkit for business](#).

What have other councils done?

Organisation	Category	Summary
Blaenau Gwent Council	Business Hub	Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council has an online Business Hub dedicated to Blaenau Gwent businesses and start-ups, enabling businesses to connect with each other and discover local opportunities. This includes information on investment opportunities, property availability and events.
Havant Council and East Hampshire Council	Business Hub	Havant Borough Council and East Hampshire District Council funded the Havant and East Hampshire Business Hub – a community for local small business owners in the Havant and East Hampshire area. Business owners can access a team of specialists and get free advice on improving online presence. The councils also collaborate with Havant and East Hants Mind – a charity providing mental health resources for residents of Havant and Hampshire in person and online.
Merton Council	Office Space	Merton Council partnered with Wimbletech , which provides office spaces for individuals and small businesses. This is done by partnering with under-utilised local spaces and local libraries, which are often in need of additional footfall and revenue, and transform them into vibrant tech hubs. Wimbletech also provides advice to support local businesses and charities with digital challenges. With support from Merton Council’s Economic Development and Library departments, Wimbletech now has over 130 start-ups and businesses using the space.

How to start putting this ambition into practice

Developing the infrastructure that local businesses need

Ensure you meet local businesses' connectivity requirements, regularly engaging with them to understand their experiences.

Create dedicated office spaces, hubs and other physical spaces to support businesses to use digital and technology.

Recognise the benefits to businesses and third sector organisations in using digital technologies in your economic plan.

Building digital capability

Actively develop local digital skills in your area by working in partnership with Local Skills Advisory Panels, LEPs and other initiatives.

Transfer your unused apprenticeship levy to businesses to help them access digital talent.

Engage with your local businesses to understand what digital skills they lack and where best to target training.

Providing support on using digital technology

Work with partner organisations in providing advice to businesses in improving their digital presence.

Provide tailored support on your website to businesses and third sector organisations on using digital technology.

Provide support specifically for businesses on your high street to transition to e-commerce and improve their social media presence.



Ethics and sustainability

Outcome:

The council uses digital technology in pursuit of the common good and does no harm; it protects human agency, fairness, transparency, and the environment.

What we mean by ethics and sustainability

Councils need to think about the transparent and ethical use of technology and data in their local areas, to protect residents and ensure that technology works for everyone. They also increasingly need to be aware of the sustainability of their digital services, recognising the important role councils play in reducing local emissions through good leadership and place-making. Councils have a responsibility to purchase digital goods and services in as sustainable a way as possible.

What are a council's responsibilities?

Digital ethics	Sustainability
<p>It is critical to understand when Personal Identifiable Information is being used within a council and to comply with the Data Protection Act 2018, which states that everyone responsible for using personal data has to follow 'data protection principles'.</p> <p>For more information around broader statutory legislation, and the ethical use of data regarding data access, stewardship and usage see the Data section.</p>	<p>The Social Value Act 2012 requires councils to consider the social, economic and environmental impact of new technology and how it can best benefit the local community.</p> <p>The National Social Value Measurement Framework offers a flexible, option-based framework for procurement, from which councils can select elements that match their priorities.</p>

Ways of supporting ethical digital and data use

Promote an ethical culture

At a strategic level, leaders should embed the [7 Nolan Principles](#) established by the [Committee on Standards in Public Life](#) to promote an ethical culture and good governance across their authority. Consult other guidance like LOTI's [five ethical principles](#), the CDEI's [framework for addressing trust in public sector data use](#), and the [AI Select Committee's proposed five principles](#). Principles should be formalised and incorporated into a set of commitments or a data charter (see [Camden Council](#)) to guide a council's approach to ethics.

Manage data projects ethically and responsibly

Be specific about and justified in the purpose of data use, especially in the case of personal data which rests on a legal basis. Think: Does the data need to be collected, accessed, shared or used in the first place? How will you promote data integrity and maximise value? How will you ensure decisions are transparent and explainable? The project should clearly articulate its purpose and justify why the work is needed.

Focus on data quality such as [completeness, comprehensiveness, consistency and accuracy](#). Follow communication principles set out in the [UK Algorithmic Transparency Standard](#).

Manage technology resources sustainably and responsibly

When considering buying new technology, [assess whether there is a real, justifiable need](#). Sometimes, the most sustainable option may be to think about alternative ways to manage existing technology. This can include collaborating with other councils to recover and reuse technology (see the [Sustainable Open Contracting toolkit](#), specifically on [ways to measure recyclability](#)), considering whole-life costs of technology (see the EC's [assess life-cycle costing](#)), and promoting sustainable technology use and consumption across the council by ensuring staff turn devices off when they are not being used.

Sustainability standards in the digital sector

When buying hardware like displays, notebooks, tablets, smartphones, desktops, PCs, projectors, headsets, network equipment, data storage, and servers, look for a TCO (an international, Type 1 Ecolabel). This provides clear standards for sustainable ICT equipment. This includes criteria for The TCO's free [Criteria Document](#) provides information on all essential criteria for the 12 different products. When buying new technology, check to see if it has the relevant ecolabel, or to see if it is able to meet the same standards required by the TCO ecolabel for each product category.

[Energy Star](#) is a Type I-like ecolabel which sets a maximum level of energy consumption for electric appliances. Energy Star labels use between [10-15 per cent](#) less energy than standard appliances. The Energy Star rating or certification can help identify products that are the most energy efficient models. Consult the [HP guide on sustainable IT purchasing](#) for more advice.

Ways to assess digital and data risks

Adopt a data ethics framework

To consider digital and data risks, adopt a data ethics framework to foster inclusive approaches to policy, product and service design. Useful frameworks include UK Government Digital Service's (GDS) [Data Ethics Framework](#) on appropriate and responsible data use; the Open Data Institute's [Data Ethics Canvas](#) to identify and manage ethical issues; and LOTI's [Data Ethics Capabilities Framework](#) which outlines the capabilities needed to 'do' ethics meaningfully.

Perform impact assessments

Impact assessments are useful tools to help in the early management of ethical considerations and risks. Examples include the [Data Protection Impact Assessment](#) (there is a legal basis as to when these are required) to identify and minimise data protection risks and the [UK Statistics Authority Ethics Self-Assessment Tool](#) to support accurate estimations of 'ethical risks' of proposals.

Consider supply chains

To assess sustainability and environmental risks, mitigate occupation safety and health risks in the supply chain. Councils can exert significant influence on the supply chain by [requiring suppliers and contractors to work towards net zero](#) and demonstrate a commitment to social sustainability. [Requesting specific information](#) such as whether there is publicly available information regarding the supply chain or a [supplier Code of Conduct](#) in place will help facilitate sustainability in the ICT sector.

What have other councils done?

Organisation	Category	Summary
Brent Council	Data Ethics Governance	Brent Council has set up a Data Ethics Board to bring together members around the ethical implications of the council's data use, based on ODI's Data Ethics Canvas framework. The Board supports the council in identifying and supporting residents – including marginalised groups – in using data ethically, such as where data projects may adversely impact residents. Membership includes legal, data and information governance experts, and is supported by officers who provide input and secretariat functions. The Board has provided advice to projects including digital exclusion; children and young people; community and resident engagement; and financial inclusion.

Organisation	Category	Summary
Bristol Council	Sustainable Procurement	Bristol Council has set out its vision for be a fair, healthy and sustainable city by ensuring its suppliers of work, goods and services promote equality and use resources sustainably. Bristol has devised a toolkit of requirements based on Government Buying Standards , the One City Climate Strategy and Ecological Emergency Strategy targets . Its commitments include to carry out a Health and Sustainability Pre-specification Assessment (HSPA) before starting a tender process to identify key environmental opportunities in higher value contracts, and to move towards measuring the carbon emissions and savings that result from the council's contracts.
Cambridgeshire Council	Sustainable Procurement	Cambridgeshire County Council and University College London developed two tools to aid Scope 3 emissions reductions : a quantitative Carbon Calculator and a qualitative Code of Practice. These provide a standardised, transparent mechanism to measure emissions, and demonstrate best practice to effectively communicate a council's ambitions to its suppliers. The carbon calculator will improve reporting and accounting of Scope 3 emissions by enabling carbon emissions to be quantified and KPIs to be integrated into evaluation and contractual processes. The Code of Conduct provides transparency of the council's expectations of its suppliers, and enables council staff to understand and reduce environmental implications of their procurement services.

How to start putting this ambition into practice

Creating a culture that promotes fair and transparent use of digital technology

Demonstrate a commitment to ethical principles at the strategic and leadership level.

Embed ethical principles in projects and when designing products or services.

Adopt a data ethics framework to build trust and accountability in the way you use your residents' data.

Risk assessing your technologies and services

Ensure your technologies and services are inclusive and accessible by following standards.

Carry out impact assessments when necessary to manage ethical risks with projects and services.

Build relationships with suppliers who are committed to promoting sustainability and transparency throughout the whole supply chain.

Using digital technology in an environmentally friendly way

Identify opportunities for re-using, recycling or upcycling existing technology equipment (in your council or in others) before buying new equipment.

Promote organisation-wide use of ecolabels and other sustainable procurement practices, clearly establishing sustainability requirements for different product categories.

Educate your council staff and residents on how to engage with technology in a sustainable way.



Inclusion

Outcome:

The council promotes the benefits of the internet, digital technology and digital services in ways that are available and accessible to everyone.

What we mean by inclusion

Digital services need to work for everyone, or users can face being excluded. Millions of people in the UK are currently not able to benefit from accessing or using digital services. This digital exclusion can be due to factors like lack of internet access, or confidence in digital tools, or services not meeting their particular accessibility needs. A commitment to inclusion, supported by senior leadership, should be a key tenet in councils' digital strategy.

Ways of addressing inclusion needs and barriers

Understand needs and barriers

Can residents easily access the internet? The answer will differ between urban and rural location, and will be exacerbated by differences in income, language, household size and age. LOTI's [24 Digital Exclusion Personas](#) is a good tool to help understand the breadth and intersection of these factors.

Explore national funding schemes

Local authorities often have no dedicated budget to commit to digital inclusion. DCMS's [Digital Inclusion Evaluation Toolkit](#) can help to evaluate digital inclusion activities locally and make a case for investment and partnerships. By knowing what is already happening, there may be an opportunity to form the basis of a digital inclusion programme. The [Digital Inclusion Toolkit](#) outlines innovative ways councils have funded digital inclusion programmes.

There are opportunities for councils to exploit funding from recycled devices, promoting circularity, which also supports climate action. Alternatively, these funding schemes can also help resource programmes: [UK Community Renewal Fund](#) and [Local Digital Fund](#), LOTI's Digital Inclusion Innovation Programme, and organisations like [National Lottery](#) or [Good Things Foundation](#) from which councils can receive grants to work with digitally excluded residents.

Ways of increasing access for residents

Increase access to devices

Reducing the barriers to accessing devices within a community is crucial in tackling digital exclusion. However, implementing only works well if the right skills and support are also provided. Some councils such as [Oldham](#), [Royal Greenwich](#) and [Trafford](#) already operate device lending schemes. For guidance, see the Digital Inclusion Toolkit's [how to set up and run a device lending scheme](#), LOTI's [step-by-step guide to running a device lending or gifting scheme](#) and [Reboot](#) by Nominet.

Where possible, have a range of devices available, and favour gifting, rather than lending, to meet the needs of a wide range of residents. There are also partner organisations councils can look to including Good Things Foundation's [Device Bank](#), which upcycles old devices from businesses for distribution and [Community Calling](#) for mobile phones.

Improving residents' access online

Follow the Connectivity guidance in this document on improving connectivity across a council.

Apply for access to Good Things Foundation's [National Databank](#) which provides free data to partners to be distributed to residents experiencing [data poverty](#).

Provide free Wi-Fi in community buildings including libraries, community halls, children's centres, social care settings and council housing.

Leverage social value agreements with network providers during contract negotiations to secure free or subsidised broadband packages.

Provide prepaid dongles (see [Royal Greenwich's data lending scheme](#)) to residents.

Support residents to develop digital skills sustainably

Digital skills training and support need to be pitched at the right level to be effective. Training should focus on the basics, be provided in an informal setting, and be delivered in the smallest possible groups. Some examples include:

- digital hubs where individuals providing digital skills support are based, like [Newham's Digital Inclusion Hub](#)
- helpline models to support residents over the phone or via email with specific queries such as Dorset's [Digital Hotline](#) or Stockport's [DigiKnow Helpline](#)
- signposting models to help access information online, such as [West Berkshire Directory](#) or [Salford's online centre map](#) which maps local online centres
- mentorship programmes, providing residents with 1-2-1 mentoring with business professionals, such as Nottingham's [Clicksilver Connections](#).

Which standards and guidance can be followed?

- [Public Sector Bodies \(Websites and Mobile Applications\) Accessibility Regulations 2018](#). Councils are legally required to improve website accessibility and publish an Accessibility Statement (see the Department for Work and Pensions' (DWP) [Accessibility Manual](#)).
- [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.1 \(WCAG\)](#) outlines criteria council websites must meet to be legally compliant. Councils should stay up-to-date with the latest guidelines, with [WCAG 2.2](#) set to be published in April 2023.
- Apply the WCAG guidelines for [websites and web tools](#). Start by using one of the

industry-approved web accessibility tools, such as [Siteimprove](#), to check a website and understand where there are accessibility issues. It is important to pair this with testing website content with users with different accessibility needs. Even five to 10 users is a good sample size. The tips below are useful to keep in mind.

Basic standards to follow for inclusive website design

The following standards are based on [WCAG's Four Principles of Accessibility](#):

Provide alternative formats for all videos/graphics such as captions and transcriptions.

Think about the use of text contrast i.e. do not use a light grey against a white background.

Make sure information is organised in a logical way, follow [visual hierarchy principles](#).

Make sure you can size text up or down, or make images bigger.

Do not rely solely on [sensory characteristics](#) (such as shape, colour, size or visual location) for understanding or operating content.

Make sure all your webpages are titled and use headings logically (such as going from H1 to H4).

When linking to external sites, the link text should describe exactly where you are going.

Be predictable about your formatting for example a link should be blue and underlined.

Describe when there are errors, such as if a password is entered wrong.

Give labels when content requires input such as a box for names should be labelled 'names'.

What tools and resources are available?

Data and toolkits performance

- [The Consumer Data Research Centre's Internet User Classification map](#), [Tech Partnership's Digital Exclusion Heatmap](#) and [Lloyds Bank's Consumer Digital Index](#) are good starting points to understand access levels by council area.
- Greater Manchester Combined Authority's [Digital Exclusion Risk Index](#) can be used to assess exclusion risks.
- LGA and Socitm's [Digital Inclusion Assessment](#) outlines the structures and frameworks needed to assess the digital exclusion of residents.
- The [Digital Inclusion Toolkit](#) designed by Leeds Council and partners has guides, case studies and insights to support digital inclusion work.
- [Digital Inclusion for Health and Social Care](#) helps healthcare providers ensure digital services are delivered as inclusively as possible.

Networks and partnerships

Good Things Foundation's network tackling digital exclusion, [Greater Manchester Digital Inclusion Taskforce](#), [LGA Digital Inclusion Network](#), the [Local Digital Skills Partnership](#) and Digital Unite's [Digital Champions Network's](#) online platform for digital champions.

What have other councils done?

Organisation	Category	Summary
Hackney Council	Digital Inclusion	Hoop'd is a community management tool that aims to build online social environments and tackle exclusion and isolation by driving community engagement. Hoop'd originated from a membership group – Hackney Circle formed in 2014 – that saw older residents in Hackney Council being left behind. Its mission was to bring older residents back into the online community. Hoop'd delivers tailored and personalised access to local activities, including forming local community groups, activities, events and support schemes.
Wigan Council	Digital Skills Support	Wigan Council's TechMates initiative invites individuals (as a resident) to be supported by the community and also support (as a TechMate) the community by sharing digital knowledge, helping residents learn, grow, and discover digitally. They provide three services: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TechMate Tea Parties is a free drop-in session for anyone looking for support with basic digital skills, ideal for beginners. They are attended by TechMate volunteers, and residents can either bring or have a device provided. • TechMate Telephone Support is a digital mentor service run by volunteers and council staff providing one-to-one digital support for residents unable to leave their homes. • Become a TechMate is a service that trains people to become digital mentors.
Leeds Council	Digital Inclusion	Leeds City Council was part of the 2021-2022 cohort of LGA Digital Pathfinders Programme funded to create a community-based model to increase digital inclusion' . The model convenes different partners already doing work on digital inclusion for communities in Leeds. The aim is to better understand the needs of a community and co-design digital inclusion initiatives together. Follow their progress on their project Miro board .

How to start putting this ambition into practice

Understanding local digital inclusion needs

Use digital tools to map and understand digital exclusion in your local area.

Be aware of the digital inclusion activities that are already happening in your local area through partners and third sector organisations.

Make digital inclusion a key pillar of your digital strategy and align it with other council and place-based strategies.

Making digital technologies and services available and accessible for your residents and staff

Provide free connectivity and digital support offerings in community buildings including libraries, community halls, children's centres, social care settings and council housing.

Set up digital hubs to provide targeted digital support across your council.

Implement a device lending or donation scheme to ensure low barrier access to digital devices.

Following accessibility standards and guidance

Conduct testing of your council's website/applications with people with additional accessibility needs to fully understand the accessibility of your website.

Test and comply with WCAG 2.1 Level AA Standards for all of your websites and web apps.

Follow WCAG's Four Principles of Accessibility for all of your websites and web apps.



Leadership

Outcome:

The leadership of the council drives the use of digital technology to achieve strategic and operational goals, and facilitates organisational transformation.

What we mean by leadership

Every leader today is a digital leader and all council roles have a digital component. Being a digital leader does not necessarily mean learning how to code or have a technical understanding of cyber security. Nor does it mean you can only work digitally. Instead, council leaders should take ownership of their organisation's digital journey by understanding key digitalisation areas.

What to check for as a digital leader

Connectivity	Understand the benefits of mobile and broadband connectivity. Know the coverage in your area and steps to take to improve it. Be aware of national funding schemes for broadband and mobile connectivity so you can set the agenda for new projects.
Data	Meet government data requirements as per the Single Data List 2022-23 to drive sound and effective use of data across your council. Understand how to use data to drive improvements in service and corporate functions.
Democracy and participation	Work with your members to accommodate the delivery of council meetings in efficient and technology-enabled ways. Understand the steps to take to create meaningful community engagement using digital tools.
Ethics and sustainability	Understand how to comply with the Data Protection Act 2018, as well as other frameworks for the ethical use of technology and data. Evaluate the sustainability of your digital products and supply chains, and drive sustainable practices.
Inclusion	Engage and convene digital inclusion networks in the community and voluntary sectors to support digital inclusion interventions. Promote inclusion and accessibility of your programmes and services. Ensure your council's website/services comply with WCAG standards.
Economic productivity and growth	Support partnerships with industry and the third sector. Think creatively about using technology to boost your local economy. Think about how your digital transformation approach affects local businesses, charities and third sector organisations.
Organisational capability	Know the digital skills lacking in your council in order to target digital upskilling more effectively. Make use of digital champions to lead digital upskilling. Think proactively about new ways to recruit talent.

Partnership	Identify the most strategic suppliers and maintain strong relationships through proactive relationship management. Understand how partnerships affect service and data ownership and develop effective strategies for mitigating against ownership risks.
Security and resilience	Follow guidance from the National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) including using self-assessment tools and frameworks to understand your performance. Be aware of vulnerabilities to cyber attacks and how to mitigate them and take a security-minded approach to technology opportunities
Services	Apply standards across your digital projects, such as the civil service's Service Manual and the Technology Code of Practice. Test and iterate your services regularly, working closely with end-users to improve functionality and usability.
Value	Proactively identify how the council can generate new sources of revenue and lead their strategy and implementation. Understand how your expenditure compares to other councils.

Way of developing a digital strategy

Digital strategies are useful for setting out digital priorities, and communicating them widely across the council, to residents and businesses. A digital strategy should be clear, concise and accessible. [Brent's Digital Strategy](#) and [Carmarthenshire County Council's Digital Strategy](#) are good examples. Consider the following factors when thinking about a digital strategy.

A good digital strategy should...	So that...
View digital as a means rather than an end	It is focused on real world outcomes. Digital is not an end goal itself. Start with your goal, then see how digital will help you achieve it.
Be informed by the needs of residents, officers and members	It is grounded in user needs. The best digital services will shorten the feedback loop between service providers and users.
Have specific objectives	It is actionable. Do you want to go from paper-based meetings to online? Improve broadband in rural areas? Specific objectives will make implementation easier.

A good digital strategy should...	So that...
Provide a roadmap	You can prioritise and plan ahead. It is likely that you will have many goals. You should prioritise what you will achieve in six months and in a year.
Have metrics of success	Success is measurable. By 2024, where do you want to be on connectivity?
Set out how it maps to other local plans	It aligns with wider council priorities. This way digital doesn't become an add-on but a pillar for how to achieve the council's wider goals.
Be inspired by other councils' digital strategies	It does not reinvent the wheel. Learn from other councils what has worked and what has not.

Ways of driving a digital culture

Some key qualities of effective digital leadership are outlined below:

Take ownership of your council's digital journey.

Spearhead your council's digital transformation and be actively involved in shaping the digital agenda.

Be agile

Iterate and reiterate until you find the way forward. Do digital with a view of user needs, an open mind and a readiness to fail and learn.

Ask the right questions

It's easy to get fixated on targets or products, which do not reflect the structural aspects of digitalisation. You should be concerned with mechanisms in place to facilitate innovation with partners; policies in place to embed digital skills; or training available to build cyber resilience.

Manage expectations

Digital will not solve everything. Every council has a different set of resources, and you should adjust your expectations accordingly.

Be supportive

Reassure colleagues if they present doubts. Have discussions on digital, and be supportive. Shropshire Council did this by creating digital profiles to demonstrate how digital benefits their work.

What tools and resources are available?

- Nesta’s [introduction to digital transformation](#) explains how leaders can promote digital.
- TechUK’s ‘[Council of the future: a digital guide for councillors](#)’ explains how digital can improve services.
- LOTI’s [Leadership Series](#) introduces digital government and what technology leaders should know.
- Socitm’s [Leadership Academy](#) provides educational courses on digital leadership.
- [Digital Leaders](#) run digital transformation programmes for leaders across all sectors.
- The LGA’s [Leadership Essentials Courses](#) provides themed learning opportunities for councillors as well as its [Councillor Introduction to Data and Digital](#).

What have other councils done?

Organisation	Category	Summary
Bristol Council	Digital Strategy	Bristol City Council’s Strategy, 2022-2027 is divided into four ambitions: inclusion, security, digital skills and partnership. It includes measures of success for each ambition, a glossary of terms and a detailed digital transformation roadmap. It outlines how the strategy connects to the council’s corporate, data and connectivity strategy, and is reviewed every two years.
Harrow Council	Digital Culture	In 2017 Harrow Council, in response to increasing financial strains, developed an internal culture that promoted innovation. Supported by techUK, the council outlined nine steps for digital innovation around service delivery , working with the tech sector to demystify local government and keeping councillors and officers aligned. The council established an innovation board, consisting of key council stakeholders to support the development of new ideas using digital technologies.

How to start putting this ambition into practice

Creating an impactful digital strategy to achieve strategic and operational goals

Make sure your digital strategy is outcomes-driven, and use technology as a means not an end.

Regularly review and publish information about how you are performing against your strategy.

Speak to other councils about how they have developed their strategies and learn from each other, including understanding how their strategies differ from yours.

Creating a digital culture that facilitates organisational transformation

Implement mechanisms to exchange ideas and best practice on digitalisation.

Promote digital transformation across your organisation, not just by your technology teams.

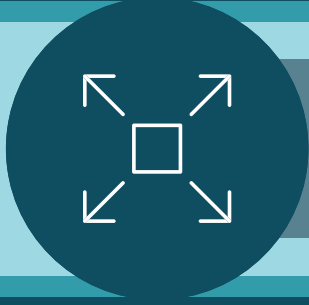
Empower staff with working tools and equipment to make the most of digital.

Leading by example

Actively build on your own digital skills through training and encourage others to do the same.

Develop a detailed understanding of the 12 strategic outcomes areas within this Almanac, being informed of both the opportunities and risks that digital technology brings.

Visibly champion and support digital transformation in your council.



Organisational capability

Outcome:

The council puts digital technology at the heart of the way it works and trains its workforce, and has talent pipelines to benefit retention and relieve pressure on recruitment.

What we mean by organisational capability

Councils need the right digital skills to realise the full benefits of digitalisation. This entails training, development and support to close the digital skills gap in the workforce and governance. Councils can move towards the full benefits of digitalisation by developing their workforce's digital skills, building out technical capabilities and embedding a digital-first culture.

Ways of understanding needs

Embed basic digital skills

Here are some tools to use when looking to build digital skills:

- Frontline staff: UK.GOV's [Essential Digital Skills framework](#) defines the digital skills adults need to in order to benefit from, participate in and contribute to digitalisation.
- Social care workers: Consult the SkillsForCare's [core digital skills toolkit](#).
- Digital, Data and Technology (DDaT) Teams: Consult LOTI's [DDaT job description library](#). The LGA is currently developing a [DDaT framework for local government](#), which will become a key resource.
- ICT Teams: Consult the [Skills Framework for the Information Age](#).

Identify skills gaps

The Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisation's [Essential Digital Skills Checklist](#) is a useful resource for checking skills levels. Periodically surveying staff will help in understanding where there are digital skills gaps.

Upskill staff to meet identified gaps

Ensuring that digital skills training is useful for everyone and builds confidence is crucial for building organisational capabilities. For new hires, look to make mandatory training for new technology. And for existing staff, encourage regular training and commit to providing protected time for training such as a 'digital hour' each month. Where there are specialised digital skills to learn, consult [Local Digital's Training Library](#) which has digital courses for councils that have signed the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities' (DLUHC) [Local Digital Declaration](#).

Digital champions

Digital champions are a valuable resource for developing digital skills and culture in a council. They might be volunteers from the community who teach residents how to use digital technologies (as discussed in the Inclusion section) or council officers who take a lead digital role. They do not need to be digital experts – just keen to help and willing to act as a go to point for digital queries, helping to improve the digital skills of others.

Ways of finding staff and keeping them

Sell the benefits of local government

Ninety-four per cent of councils responding to the [LGA's 2022 Local Government Workforce survey](#) said they were experiencing recruitment and retention difficulties. Of those councils responding, 43 per cent said they were experiencing difficulties in recruiting ICT professionals, after planning officers and legal professionals. Recruiting this occupation was particularly problematic for counties, with 83 per cent selecting it as a difficulty. There is considerable competition from the private sector when it comes to DDaT roles, and 15 per cent of councils responding to the LGA's survey said they provided market supplements for ICT professionals. Yet, compared to other sectors, local government can offer greater job security, better pensions and the opportunity to make a real, positive difference to society.

Consider the recruitment lifecycle

Consult LOTI's [guide to better recruitment for hard to fill roles](#), which includes considerations for all stages of recruitment and its [DDaT job description library](#) for help with writing job descriptions. Also think about how council vacancies are advertised. For example, [Devon County Council has a section on its website where jobs in the Digital Transformation team are advertised with videos explaining what it is like to work in the council along with employee testimonials.](#)

Use apprenticeships

Apprenticeships can help to improve the talent pipeline of digital staff. The government's [apprenticeship levy](#) offers a financial and strategic opportunity to attract more digital staff. It offers funding to employers in any sector paid at a rate of 0.5 per cent of an employer's annual pay bill. All employers have an allowance of £15,000, meaning the levy is applicable on bills over the first £3 million. The funding can then be used to upskill existing staff or hire new staff to cover outstanding skills gaps. Consult the LGA's advice on [making the most out of the apprenticeship levy](#) and LOTI's [Digital Apprenticeship Guide](#) which provides an overview of digital apprenticeships currently available to councils.

Ways of building a digital culture

Gain a good understanding

Embedding a digital culture across an organisation can feel daunting as it is hard to know where to start. Ask what digital means. Tom Loosermore, a founder GDS, defines digital as: 'applying the culture, processes, business models and technologies of the internet era to respond to people's raised expectations.' This definition is referred to widely across the UK Government and is a useful explanation for councils undertaking digital transformation programmes.

Think holistically

A council's responsibilities are wide-ranging which can make the role of digital harder to grasp and more challenging to get right. It is important to think holistically to truly embrace the opportunities of digitalisation and embed digital within a range of touchpoints including within council teams, and across local businesses and the wider community.

Communicate the benefits

Resistance to digitalisation change is almost inevitable. An effective way to mitigate against opposition is to fully communicate the concrete benefits of digitalisation. Consider peer-to-peer sessions where staff engage in collaborative learning based on their own experiences and seek to make the benefits more visible. For example, Shropshire Council publishes [Digital Profiles](#) outlining how digital technologies have benefited an employee's working life. Other resources include the [guide to workforce planning](#) by the LGA, and the [LGA's workforce consultancy](#), which covers organisational development, retention and skills development.

What have other councils done?

Organisation	Category	Summary
Westminster Council	Apprenticeships	Westminster City Council launched its Tech Lion programme in 2021, facilitated by the apprenticeship levy, which supported 18 to 24 year olds into digital apprenticeships as data analysts and software engineers. Working with Multiverse, participants spent a day at a leading tech company. This shows how apprenticeships can be leveraged to improve councils' internal technical capabilities while also supporting young people into employment.
Shropshire Council	Digital Workforce Strategy	Shropshire Council took an approach to digital transformation rooted in the workforce. Its Digital Workforce Strategy 2020-2021 highlights the need for a 'curious' digital culture that incentivises digital ways of working from all staff. Stories were used from different employees on how digital ways of working have benefited them. The strategy sets out a 'digital hour' every month where staff can learn new skills, led and overseen by Digital Champions in every team.

Organisation	Category	Summary
Plymouth Council	Digital Skills	A key part of Plymouth City Council's digital plan is enabling a digitally skilled workforce. The council equipped 2,000 staff with laptops and mobile devices, introduced mandatory training for all staff on data protection and information security. When the council rolled out Microsoft Teams it was supported by 137 champions from across the organisation. The council plans to continue making use of its network of digital champions to help colleagues using new digital technology and to embed a digital culture.

How to start putting this ambition into practice

Developing workforce digital skills and knowledge

Know what digital skills staff require in their different roles across DDaT functions, and create a clear action plan for meeting any organisational gaps.

Implement mandatory digital skills training and onboarding for all new council recruits, with different requirements depending on role.

Implement Digital Champions to continuously upskill colleagues in digital skills and support with digital queries.

Developing talent pipelines to improve recruitment and retention

Develop multiple pipelines for attracting digital talent, including using apprenticeships and the National Graduate Development Programme (NGDP).

Make creative use of digital advertising for recruitment, such as posting video employee testimonials on your website.

Host council digital-focused open days, recruitment events and talks to engage with a wider community of digital and technology talent.

Creating a culture that values and incentivises digital ways of working

Clearly communicate the benefits of digital in your community and in your council, by explaining how it can improve day-to-day work.

Ensure that your overall workforce strategy aligns with your digital strategy, including clearly designating where the digital portfolio sits (for councillors and officers).

Invest in the tools, software products and equipment needed to enable staff to do their jobs in a digitally-enabled way.



Partnership

Outcome:

The council works with public, private and third sector partners to ensure an integrated, cohesive and resident-focused approach to public sector digital transformation and service provision.

What we mean by partnership

Effective digital services require effective partnerships, and getting this right is an important priority for any council. It can involve setting a partnership strategy, reviewing current partnerships, and using procurement as an effective tool to drive change. This is important in the context of a changing national procurement landscape, with a UK Procurement Bill currently passing through Parliament. Collaboration with external partners can strengthen a council's digital service provision.

Ways of working with partners

Review current suppliers

Establish a register of suppliers who provide the council's technology. This can be done using a spreadsheet or a readymade tool such as [Contract Works](#), but take a systematic approach to create a single view of your current partnerships. The best approaches will commit to ongoing risk management, including investigating external risk exposure within supply chains.

Engage with the market

Conduct regular horizon-scanning by soliciting engagement from potential technology vendors. This can be done informally via email and conversations, but also by setting up formal horizon-scanning workstreams, including supplier engagement days, technology conferences and industry events. It is particularly important at this stage to ensure engagement with local digital businesses, charities and other organisations that might struggle to access public procurement.

Benchmark spending

Engage with other councils before embarking on complex or important technology procurement exercises, such as new business systems. This can help to solve common challenges and avoid common mistakes. It can also help to leverage economies of scale when buying the same solution.

Ways of approaching service delivery

Search for the right delivery model

When delivering a technology service, decide on the best delivery model. Will it be delivered in-house, procured from the market or delivered using a hybrid solution? The Government Commercial Function's [Delivery Model Assessments Guidance Note](#) can help with framing the challenge and reaching a decision about how best to insource and outsource technology services.

Use the right approach and tools

The price point of goods and services, and the availability of suitable framework agreements, are important factors when buying technology. Thresholds refer to the maximum amount that may be paid for a single item before suppliers must engage in an open competition. For items below threshold amounts, contracts may be directly awarded for goods and services. The legal limit for councils is currently £213,477, but the use of direct awards will vary depending on your organisation's appetite for spending, and the types of services being procured.

Public procurement frameworks list suppliers who have met terms and conditions to sell to the public sector on a pre-approved basis. Goods and services from these suppliers can be 'called off' the framework without a formal procurement competition. In such cases, councils must publish on [Contracts Finder](#) if the contract is above the £25,000 threshold. There are many public procurement frameworks available to councils, which host thousands of technology providers.

Structure on-going partnerships

Developing a robust approach to contract management is critical to ensuring that work is delivered to time and budget. Good practice involves using a register of all live contracts, containing key information such as: contract owners, key performance indicators (KPIs) and on-going due-diligence. Read more about good quality contract management in the [Crown Commercial Service's guidance](#). In any technology partnership, ensure that all data created through collaboration with third parties remains accessible in its entirety – and also remains the intellectual property of the council. This will help to ensure that capability is built during contract delivery.

Ways of prioritising sustainability

Social value, including facets of sustainability, has become an increasingly important focus for councils when buying technology. This includes, for instance, supplier Carbon Reduction Plans (CRPs) and modern slavery assessments. Councils can embed sustainability into their partnerships using the three-part approach below. Further guidance is contained in the [LGA's Toolkit for Sustainable Procurement](#).

Conduct a Discovery project

To obtain a clear picture of sustainability, identify the council's environmental priorities by assessing existing reporting metrics, mapping current guidance and resources, and conducting a high-level supplier and contract sustainability assessment.

Develop an action plan

Set clear objectives by which to measure progress. This will involve identifying priority procurement categories, detailing the resources needed to support teams and suppliers, identifying sustainable procurement tooling, and defining the governance structure and responsibilities for meeting targets.

Implementing and measuring

To measure progress, pilot changes in specific procurements, before developing a bank of contract clauses and a mechanism for scoring suppliers, which can be used across multiple purchases.

Ways of collaborating with the third sector

Charities, third sector organisations and other local 'anchor' institutions can be important digital partners to deliver or advise on digital and technology. Some guiding principles to consider when working with these partners are:

- be open to new partnerships with charitable and voluntary organisations, as well as private sector partners
- commit time to building partnerships before launching large-scale projects
- carry out due diligence for all projects and seek advice from the council's finance/legal experts or consult the Charity Commission
- use community action investment and programmes to stimulate new partnerships and collaboration within the market
- ensure that partners are actively engaged in governance, planning and monitoring, and are able to take accountability for delivery.

What have other councils done?

Organisation	Category	Summary
Caerphilly Council	eProcurement	Caerphilly County Borough Council's eProcurement strategy has committed the council to using a single, modern eProcurement solution end-to-end through the P2P process. The council has successfully moved all its processes on-system and away from analogue and paper-based alternatives. By reporting data from these systems into a single solution, it has also developed an end-to-end view of the council's spending habits.
Hackney Council	Sustainable procurement	In 2018, Hackney Council published its <u>Sustainable Procurement Strategy for 2018-2022</u> . The strategy tackles issues such as legislative requirements and best practice. The strategy is framed around three core commitments: Procuring Green, Procuring a Better Society and Procuring Fair Delivery. Each aspect introduces detailed and specific metrics to measure the council's progress towards objectives over time. The strategy is also embedded within Hackney's broader Community Strategy for 2018-28, which aims to ensure all targets align with strategic objectives across the organisation.
Manchester Council	Procurement Impact	Manchester City Council undertakes annual analyses of the impact its procurement policies have on its local communities. This includes the percentage of spend being retained in Manchester, jobs for residents supported through its supply chain, the number of volunteering hours provided through the supply chain and spend with charities and the voluntary sector. Analysis of these metrics led Manchester City Council to reduce the volume of questions for contractors. Over the last decade, this increased the council's level of spending within its boundaries from 50 per cent of all spend to over 71 per cent.

How to start putting this ambition into practice

Taking an integrated and cohesive approach to procurement

Develop a procurement strategy to harness supplier innovation, especially through local suppliers, and support other councils when buying technology.

Conduct effective contract management as part of a wider commitment to performance reporting across the organisation in all technology contracts.

Capture all procurement and spend data in a single place – including on-going contract management – and visualise and share it across your council in a systematic way.

Embedding environmental and social value in your technology contracts

Develop a sustainability strategy and establish your organisation as a leading council in the region, and work with other councils to help them procure technology sustainably.

Focus tendering opportunities on partnering with sustainable, innovative and local technology suppliers, and develop opportunities in partnership with neighbouring authorities.

Use a common set of Themes, Outcomes and Measures (TOMs) as part of your monitoring and evaluation approach and create them in partnership with regional public sector bodies, for technology procurement.

Working with third sector partners when delivering digital service provision

Run a programme of engagement with strategic technology partners in the third sector, including at the regional and national level.

Leverage local expertise by developing a register of charitable organisations working in technology within your local community.

Support local charities by participating in their non-for-profit programmes relating to digital.



Security and resilience

Outcome:

The council's networks, infrastructure, data and services are as secure as possible, and the council is resilient to cyber attacks.

What we mean by security and resilience

Cyber security is one of the most important and challenging roles within a council: it has been estimated that the number of attacks across all councils in the UK in 2022 could have been more than 11 million. Councils need the knowledge and resources to protect the data they hold against cyber threats. This is not just a task for an IT team, but for the whole council.

What are cyber vulnerabilities and threats?

Human points of failure

Most cyber attacks are the result of human error – clicking on a phishing link, losing a laptop or writing down passwords on paper. Committing time and resources to upskilling staff on how to keep themselves and residents secure is the best way to improve a council's resilience.

Out of date systems

As councils become more digital, more systems will move online. To limit vulnerabilities, staff need support to run their devices on the latest available software and to install regular security updates.

Remote working and online collaboration

More council staff are working remotely than pre-pandemic, and these users must feature in all security and resilience approaches. This means assessing risks, committing to policies suitable for a home environment, providing training and guidance that can be accessed in any location, and accounting for vulnerabilities of home networks.

Supplier and partner relationships

Bringing new suppliers and partners into the council's network brings new risks. Ensure all new suppliers have required accreditations and undergo appropriate risk assessment checks – including cyber security and data protection – throughout contract duration.

New technologies and approaches

As councils embrace innovative technologies – such as AI or IoT – their attack surface will increase. As the network of connected infrastructure expands, make sure the 'end points' of the council's digital estate are as robust as its core systems.

What steps can be taken to mitigate against basic cyber threats?

Do...

- use two-factor authentication when available to keep your accounts safe
- create strong passwords made up of three random words and a mixture of numbers, symbols, lower and upper-case letters; sensitive or administrative accounts should have a higher level of authentication, managed by a secure password manager
- ensure IT providers perform regular back-ups of data and follow the [321 Backup Rule](#)
- keep your laptop in a physically secure location when it is not in use, such as a locker
- close pop-up windows on your browser by clicking the 'X' button in the corner of the window, not by clicking within the window
- report an incident to the relevant team within your council who should escalate it to the [NCSC Incident Page](#) if necessary, and do so quickly
- use anti-virus software and update it regularly to recognise the latest threats
- restart your laptop once a week at a minimum to get automatic updates
- regularly update your device's operating system, web browser and other major software, only using the manufacturers' updates – ideally this should be done by enabling the auto-updates feature
- establish an automatic patching schedule for all IT systems
- follow the [five steps for incident response management](#) in the event of a breach
- ensure that your contracted suppliers and systems follow the same cyber threat assessment and mitigation approaches, and are not a possible point of failure.

Do not...

- download and install software from online sources you do not trust
- click on a link from an online source you do not trust or are not familiar
- open email attachments unless you were expecting them, even if from someone you know
- use the same password or password formula for any accounts
- write down your password, especially not on a post-it stuck to your computer or desk
- give out your password to anyone, whether you know them or not
- select 'Remember My Password' – most apps will not store your password securely
- use common passwords like 'password1' or anything containing publicly available information such as your date of birth
- leave your laptop unattended, even for a few minutes
- respond to emails or requests for personal or financial information
- install or use pirated copies of software
- set your email program to 'auto-open' attachments.

What tools and resources are available?

- [The Cyber Assessment Framework \(CAF\)](#): NCSC's framework for identifying cyber threats and assessing mitigation approaches. [DLUHC is piloting a local authority version with a number of councils.](#)
- [The LGA Cyber 360 Framework](#): Based on the CAF, this framework is a directory to support councils in reducing cyber risk, with advice to senior leadership.
- [Cyber Essentials Framework by the NCSC](#): A Government-backed scheme with the basic technical controls to help protect organisations against the most common cyber threats. Most organisations should be accredited by an external assessor to receive the [Cyber Essentials Plus](#) certification.
- [NCSC's cyber glossary](#): This is a collection of cyber definitions. The NCSC's [information for the public sector](#) page is a useful collection of cyber guidance.
- [The Good Councillor's Guide to Cybersecurity](#): This guide by the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) provides specific advice for councils on minimising cyber risks.
- [NCSC's 10 Steps to Cyber Security](#): This guide explains how organisations can protect themselves in cyberspace. Organisations can also use [NCSC's Exercise in a Box](#) to test their resilience to cyber attacks and practise a response in a safe environment.

- [LGA's 10 questions for a Councillor \(and any layperson\) to ask](#): A list of 10 questions to better understand cyber security arrangements and how risk is being managed within a council.
- [DLUHC's Local Digital Cyber Team](#): This team is running two programmes with councils – Cyber Support and Cyber Health – to help reduce the incidence and impact of cyber attacks, and to support sustainable cyber health. It is also piloting a [Local Government CAF](#) in response to its conclusion that there are 'many cyber standards, but no clear baseline' for councils.

What have other councils done?

Organisation	Category	Summary
South Somerset Council	Cybersecurity Strategy	South Somerset District Council created a Cyber Security Strategy which supports its Digital Strategy, covering an extensive range of topics from protecting information systems and data, to unauthorised access, harm or misuse. It adheres to principles set out in Cyber Essentials Plus. Importantly, it stresses the need for cyber security awareness training for all council staff and support from senior leadership.
Redcar and Cleveland Council	Cyber Incident Response	Redcar and Cleveland Council was hit by a malware cyber attack in February 2020. Online appointment bookings and social care advice were among the services put out by the attack. The council quickly embarked on a recovery plan, with help from the NCSC. The IT, business, leadership and communications teams collaborated to recover key systems and coordinate their incident response. Importantly, they communicated consistently with staff throughout the recovery process. In a video elaborating on the lessons learned from the attack , the council advises other councils to practise their response to cyber attacks, making sure everyone understands what it looks like in practice. Since then, Redcar and Cleveland has upgraded its IT systems and enrolled on a NCSC scheme, significantly improving its cyber resilience.

How to start putting this ambition into practice

Spreading awareness to minimise cyber security risk

Provide mandatory cyber security training for all staff, with a basic resilience training programme provided to mitigate against the most common vulnerabilities.

Spread awareness of the key cyber vulnerabilities across the organisation, including identifying points of failure or risk.

Promote good cyber security practice from a leadership level, visibly championing its role.

Taking proactive measures to build cyber resilience

Implement a cyber security strategy that is clearly defined, well communicated and fully aligned to your council's wider strategy, including staff and resource capabilities.

Implement a frequently reviewed Incident Response Plan with clearly defined roles, responsibilities and points of contact in the event of a cyber incident.

Assess the status of data across your key systems, ensure it is appropriately confidential and back up frequently.

Following cyber security frameworks and standards

Follow the Cyber Assessment Framework (CAF) to ensure that your networks, infrastructure and services are as secure as possible and adopt sector or use case specific guidance where relevant.

Actively engage with cybersecurity support teams in NCSC, DCMS and others to support your council on its cyber journey.

Make cyber security guidance easily accessible to all staff, and ensure that they are able to navigate and use guidance relevant for their use case.



Services

Outcome:

The council's services are designed around the needs of residents and users, and are guided by government design principles and standards.

What we mean by services

Digital services are part of a council's 'front door'. Public-facing digital services such as registering a new address, applying for a parking permit or registering for childcare are mostly available online. Making each of these transactions seamless, accessible and intuitive for residents requires careful design and planning. The UK Government has created a number of standards and frameworks to govern how digital services are designed, which serve as useful guides for councils to support them in designing services around the needs of residents.

Ways of understanding the components of effective services

Consider the key factors

When thinking about services, GDS identifies these factors:

- **End-to-end:** the entire journey from when the user starts until they finish.
- **Front-to-back:** all of the actors and processes involved in making the service happen, including internal systems and processes, supporting policy or legislation, organisational, financial and governance structures of the service.
- **Channels:** the different ways citizens can access and engage with services, including online, phone paper, and face-to-face.

Consider service patterns

Service patterns are a useful way to think about services (see [LocalGov Patterns from FutureGov](#) for some examples). Service patterns are common steps, objectives and outcomes that underpin every service. For example, applying for a parking permit, registering for childcare or applying for planning permission all have the common pattern of 'being an application'. Look across your services to see how to make services with the same pattern feel as similar and as smooth as possible.

Better digital services means...

- your residents access services anywhere, at any time with efficient, effective services
- your residents can easily access whatever they need, and spend less time navigating hard-to-use services or going through unnecessary and time-consuming steps
- your staff spend less time resolving queries, and focus on more important issues
- you need fewer staff focused on resolving queries, key in the current staffing crisis
- your residents have confidence in digital public services, and the council's use of data
- your council makes financial and efficiency savings.

Ways of designing services for users

Understand the different stages of the service lifecycle

A good approach to building digital public services is to follow the service lifecycle: from discovery, alpha, beta to live. The [Service Manual](#) is the main resource to consult at each stage of the process. At a high-level:

- [Discovery](#): Understand and validate the problem you are trying to solve.
- [Alpha](#): Test different solutions to the problems you learnt about during discovery. Here, you would build prototypes and explore new approaches.
- [Beta](#): Take your best idea from alpha and start building it. Think about how your service integrates with existing services and roll it out to users.
- [Live](#): Support the service in a sustainable way and continue to iterate over time.

Understand the Service Assessment

The [GDS Service Assessment](#) is an ongoing assurance process that runs throughout the service lifecycle. The Service Assessment was initially aimed at central government teams, but the latest version is available as a resource for the wider public sector. You can [learn more about the process and how it could help your council](#), or ask to join DLUHC's [Local Digital Slack community](#). It is important to follow accessibility standards and best practice during the lifecycle of service design (see the Inclusion section for more details). See [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines \(WCAG 2.1\)](#) for the basic standards to follow for most web services.

Test and iterate throughout the service lifecycle

Residents' needs may change rapidly, and services should be able to adapt to such changes and, as technology evolves, as part of a continuous improvement approach. [User satisfaction can be measured](#) with tools such as user surveys (which can be built into websites, see for example [Kirklees](#)), and carry out regular [usability sessions](#) to tighten feedback loops, and rapidly iterate and improve services. Consult the [Usability Benchmarking resource](#) in the Service Manual for advice on what to measure and questions to ask. Below are some high-level principles to consider when redesigning services.

Key things to consider when designing digital services

Ensure the digital service is fully completable online. Over a third of citizens use services that are nominally 'digitised' but still require at least one offline component (such as a paper form, a phone call, or in-person visit).

Consider the design of all possible channels through which citizens access digital public services. Often, usability testing is done using desktop computers, even though 70 per cent of citizens prefer to use mobile devices to access services.

Services should be translatable and, as a result, accessible in different languages.

Ensure that issues can be resolved in a single interaction with the service. Fifteen per cent of citizens have to repeat using a digital public service because they are unable to resolve issues in a single interaction, often due to technical issues or inaccessible design.

When providing an online service, there should be an offline equivalent to ensure the council meets all accessibility requirements.

Ensure APIs are built into services as a given as this will help with interoperability across multiple council services or with third party solutions.

Residents should not have to resubmit their data, to help mitigate siloed data collection and duplication of service interactions.

What tools and resources are available?

Standard	What is it?	When should you use it?
The Service Manual	A collaborative effort between local and central government in 2019. Explains how to approach building a service in four phases – discovery, alpha, beta and live. When building or developing a new service, it should pass through all four phases, passing a 'Service Assessment' between phases.	When planning, reviewing and designing services. The latest version is aimed at the wider public sector, not just central government. A good first step, before engaging with the standard, is to sign DLUHC's Local Digital Declaration . You can look at the Service Manual to understand the types of projects where the Service Standard is most useful .

Standard	What is it?	When should you use it?
<u>Local Digital Declaration</u>	A set of guiding principles to help local authorities of all sizes or capabilities deliver digital services that meet the needs of their residents.	When committing to a new way of working together using the resources available. If not already signed, sign the declaration to commit to improving services. See the Local Digital Website for case studies, best practice, and other practical service design tools.
<u>Government Design Principles</u>	A useful starting point of 10 high-level principles which can act as a guide to underpin all services.	When planning and designing new services, and when reviewing the status of existing services.
<u>The Technology Code of Practise (TCoP)</u>	A 14-point assessment framework used to score and assess services as they move between phases (Service Assessment). The standard is also relevant for DLUHC's Local Digital Declaration.	When passing a service between lifecycle phases – including passing a Service Assessment. Signatories of the Local Digital Declaration must comply with the TCoP. Use it for all technology projects or programmes.
<u>The Digital, Data and Technology Playbook</u>	Sets out 11 key policy reforms and guidance for how digital projects and services (including software and hardware) are assessed, procured and delivered.	While the playbook is mandatory for central government (on a 'comply or explain' basis), the wider public sector is encouraged to engage with it. Consult the DDaT Playbook when thinking about procuring online public services, business or back-office systems.
<u>The Digital Service Standards for Wales</u>	Outlines what is expected from new or redesigned digital services funded by Welsh public sector organisations. It focuses on wellbeing, the use of the Welsh language, user needs, ethics, security and technology.	To be used by any local authority awarded funding under the Welsh Government's Local Government Digital Fund . The main differences lie in standards 8 and 9 which include promoting wellbeing (in response to the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015) and the use of the Welsh Language.

What have other councils done?

Organisation	Category	Summary
Kingston Upon Thames Council	Service Design	Kingston Upon Thames Council redesigned its website by employing user-centred design approaches. In its Discovery phase, it hosted 26 events and talked to over 2,000 residents to understand how they used the website, and what they wanted to be able to do differently. This included removing 50 per cent of outdated or inactive pages, and re-writing 80 per cent of site content.
Essex Council	Service Patterns	Essex County Council and FutureGov have partnered to build a <u>service pattern taxonomy</u> which outlines seven common service patterns across local government with examples of specific services that use them. By breaking down services into component parts, they were able to identify common interactions and tasks across different stages of services – things like reporting a problem, applying for something, or checking eligibility.
Kirklees Council	Service Design	<u>Tell Us Once (TUO)</u> enables citizens to inform government of a death just once. It is a cross-government initiative developed in partnership with local government, and involving DWP, HM Revenue and Customs, the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) and HM Passport Office. <u>Kirklees Council has offered Tell Us Once for many years, with almost 90 per cent of people registering deaths in Kirklees using the service.</u>

How to start putting this ambition into practice

Following service and design standards

Apply the Service Standard, Technology Code of Practice, and other key national standards to your current and future projects.

Develop procedures to raise awareness among staff of the key standards and frameworks and how to use them.

Sign the Local Digital Declaration and embed its commitments into your service approach.

Taking a user-centred approach to designing and developing services

Start every project with a detailed understanding of your target users and their needs.

Invest in user research and service design capabilities and carry out user research to inform design throughout the service lifecycle.

Understand your users' accessibility requirements and conduct frequent usability testing to meet WCAG 2.1 AA standards.

Using agile development processes through the service lifecycle

Follow the discovery-alpha-beta throughout the service lifecycle for your projects.

Build services in frequent feedback loops and continuously measure user satisfaction of services.

Use Service Assessments as stage-gates for your services to pass through each phase.



Value

Outcome:

The council allocates its resources effectively by harnessing the opportunities of digital technology.

What we mean by value

Everyone in local government will be aware of the financial pressures facing councils. It is more important now than ever that councils provide efficiencies and savings for their residents and organisation. And, while having to do more with less is never easy, councils can use digital tools to deliver better value for money, and explore additional partnership and commercialisation routes.

Ways of measuring value for money on digital spend?

Take stock

Taking stock of current digital spend is a good place to start when analysing value for money. Many councils publish on their websites granular information on how they are spending money (in accordance with [government transparency guidelines](#)). This spend data can be a useful source of information about money spent on digital products and services, and can be explored using no-code tools like Tableau and PowerBI.

Benchmark spending

Compare spend profiles with other councils. Here, overall category spend ('Digital'), or product type spend ('Computers', or 'Network Services'), or even spend with specific vendors ('Microsoft') can be compared. Additionally, the House of Commons Library has [a database containing spending and funding information across English councils](#). And LG Inform has [a tool which allows value for money in one council to be compared to others](#) by unifying data on costs, performance and activity.

Ways of saving using digital technology

Move away from legacy systems

'Legacy systems' refers to long-standing and outdated IT systems, devices, and infrastructure. A study of [100 council executives](#) by Netcall found that 41 per cent of respondents thought legacy IT systems were the biggest barriers to change, second only to shortages of technical expertise (49 per cent). Out of date systems slow down digital transformation, pose risks to cyber security and come with high maintenance costs.

The [government spends almost half its IT budget servicing legacy IT systems](#) – moving away from them can provide massive efficiencies and financial savings for councils and residents in the long term. [Government guidance on managing and moving away from legacy systems](#) offers in-depth advice on planning the move to a new system. A council's IT team can decide the best approach for the organisation, whether that is to retire (drop it) or re-host.

Low-code alternatives

Low-code alternatives can offer value for money when transitioning to a new system. These solutions allow organisations to rapidly build business and service applications with minimal to no coding, and cater to increasing consumer demand for digital and accessible services while providing financial savings. For example, [South Hams District Council](#) delivered £450,000 savings over 12 months using low-code to transform outdated systems. Importantly, when building a low-code service, user research and design still remain critical. Even if development is led by a business or services team, it is still important to follow user design best practice.

Use or take part in open-sourcing

The government defines [open-source](#) as 'a way of developing and distributing software collaboratively so that it can be downloaded, used and changed by anyone'. This approach can provide better value for money as it has lower implementation and operating costs, freeing up budget for user-centred solution design. There are lots of open-source projects happening, most notably DLUHC's [Local Digital programme](#), which councils can get involved with. There is also [LocalGov Drupal](#), a community of councils working to produce a best practice web publishing platform that is freely available to all participating councils. It can reduce the cost of building a new website by up to 80 per cent and member councils have seen savings of up to £100,000 on developer costs. On their website there are [further details on becoming a member](#) to draw upon these benefits.

Ways of capturing social value in digital projects

Consider social value

Choosing the cheapest option for a digital project does not always provide best value for an organisation as a whole, or deliver the best outcomes for residents. [Social value](#) refers to the wider financial and non-financial value created in terms of social capital and also the wellbeing of individuals, communities and the environment. The LGA's [Profit with a purpose guide](#) outlines the importance of social value to a council's commercial projects.

Measure social value

Measuring the social value of a digital project can be difficult, but solutions such as the [National TOMs](#) accessed via the Social Value Portal provides a framework for measuring and reporting social value. Many councils have found this useful in better measuring social value in their contracts, such as [Stroud District Council](#). Some councils have added in their own metrics to the framework. Shropshire Council, for instance, has developed its own [Social Value Framework](#) based on the National TOMs, complete with workbooks for organisations.

Ways of creating new sources of revenue

As funding shrinks, creating new sustainable sources of revenue is essential in order to push ahead with digital change. Using digital, data and technology can help. There are many ways to create new sources of revenue using digital technologies and, depending on resources, different models can be used.

Consult tools and resources

There are lots of resources available on commercialisation such as the LGA's [productivity offer](#), [efficiency and productivity programmes](#) and information on [statutory guidance on local government investment and minimum revenue provision guidance](#). Attending the [Local Government Income Generation Conference](#) is also a useful way to get further insights into the commercial opportunities.

Review notable practice

An example of a large-scale revenue project is Greenwich Council's consultancy – [DG Cities](#) – established to work alongside the council's in-house technical team. Businesses also offer solutions, like the [Council Advertising Network](#), where councils can post ads for local businesses, creating a new revenue stream.

What have other councils done?

Organisation	Category	Summary
Teignbridge Council	Open-source	Teignbridge Council is working with East Devon, Exeter, Sedgemoor, Basildon and Brentwood Councils on a new digital revenues and benefits system . Inspired by Sedgemoor District Council's in-house revenues and benefits system , the project explores how councils can use an open-source, cost-effective solution for revenues and benefits services. With funding from DLUHC's Local Digital, the initial project ran for five months. Teignbridge Council is now exploring the potential for using the Local Digital's Continuous Funding Model to support the next stage of building and testing a revenues and benefits integration product and service. Its Show and Tell session is available to watch.

Harrogate Council	Cost Efficiency	<p>Harrogate Borough Council rolled out an <u>end-to-end smart parking system</u> in 2019, which proved to be cost-effective and brought about economic, social and environmental benefits. Partnering with North Yorkshire County Council and the provider, Appy Parking, the council identified the key spaces that were available and installed in-road parking sensors. Drivers used an app to locate a free space and pay for parking. More than 2,200 sensors were installed across on-street and off-street parking locations. By the end of August 2020, more than 14,500 people had used the system. In a survey, 62 per cent of users said they stay longer in Harrogate town because were not worrying about a pay and display ticket expiring. By using digital technologies, Harrogate Borough Council improved customer satisfaction while also saving money.</p>
Barnsley Council	Open-source	<p>Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council built an in-house income management system (IMS) which improved experiences for users and lowered running costs. The council saw it would be valuable for other councils too. It received funding from DLUHC's Local Digital Fund to create an open-source <u>Local Gov IMS</u> with Dorset Council and Lewisham Council for wider use by local government. The team encourages other councils to join the project and the IMS community.</p>

How to start putting this ambition into practice

Measuring value for money

Use digital tools to visualise spend data to better understand your spending as an organisation.

Openly compare spending to other councils to identify where savings can be made.

Incorporate social value in digital projects using tools like the national TOMS.

Using digital solutions to provide efficiencies and savings for local people and public sector budgets

Prioritise moving away from legacy systems and rationalising your technical and applications estate to cut down costs and improve resilience.

Use open-source technologies or get involved in current open-source projects to facilitate council cooperation and reduce cost.

Use low-code solutions when replacing systems or building new ones in a cost-effective way.

Creating new digital sources of revenue

Embed digital and technology as key pillars in your commercial or revenue strategy.

Diversify your sources of revenue by using digital tools like online advertising.

Collaborate with local businesses and third-sector organisations to explore how innovative partnerships and service models can generate digital revenue.

Annex A: Contributors

Local and combined authorities		
Barking and Dagenham	London Borough	Greater London
Brent	London Borough	Greater London
Cheshire East	Unitary Authority	North West
Conwy	Unitary Authority	Wales
Dorset	Unitary Authority	South West
East Riding of Yorkshire	Unitary Authority	Yorkshire and Humber
East Sussex	County	South East
Epping Forest	District	Eastern
Epsom and Ewell	District	South East
Essex	County	Eastern
Greater Manchester Combined Authority	Combined Authority	North West
High Peak Borough	District	East Midlands
Kingston upon Thames	London Borough	Greater London
Kirklees Council	Metropolitan District	Yorkshire and Humber
Leeds	Metropolitan District	Yorkshire and Humber
Lewisham	London Borough	Greater London
Lincolnshire	County	East Midlands
Nottinghamshire	County	East Midlands
Plymouth	Unitary Authority	South West
Sedgemoor	District	South West
Staffordshire Moorlands	District	West Midlands
Sunderland	Metropolitan District	North East
Sutton Council	London Borough	Greater London
Tameside	Metropolitan District	North West
Teignbridge	District	South West
Tewkesbury	District	South West
Wigan	Metropolitan District	North West

Subject matter experts

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Digital Catapult

Digital Inclusion Toolkit

Financial Conduct Authority

Good Things Foundation

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Local Government Association

LOTI

MobileUK

Mortar Works

SAAVI

Socitm

Solace

TechUK

West Midlands 5G

Annex B: Notable practice

Notable practice		
Barking and Dagenham	London Borough	Greater London
Barnsley	Metropolitan Borough	Yorkshire and Humber
Blaenau Gwent	Unitary Authority	Wales
Brent	London Borough	Greater London
Bristol	Unitary Authority	South West
Caerphilly	Unitary Authority	Wales
Cambridgeshire	County	Eastern
Cardiff	Unitary Authority	Wales
Coventry	Metropolitan Borough	West Midlands
Dorset	Unitary Authority	South West
East Hampshire	District	South East
Essex	County	Eastern
Hackney	London Borough	Greater London
Harrogate	District	Yorkshire and Humber
Harrow	London Borough	Greater London
Havant	District	South East
Kingston upon Thames	London Borough	Greater London
Kirklees	Metropolitan Borough	Yorkshire and Humber
Leeds	Metropolitan Borough	Yorkshire and Humber
Manchester	Metropolitan Borough	North West
Merton	London Borough	Greater London
Newham	London Borough	Greater London
Nottinghamshire	County	East Midlands
Plymouth	Unitary Authority	South West
Redcar and Cleveland	Unitary Authority	North East
Sedgemoor	District	South West
Shropshire	Unitary Authority	West Midlands
South Somerset	District	South West
Tameside	Metropolitan Borough	North West
Teignbridge	District	South West
Thurrock	Unitary Authority	Eastern
Westminster	London Borough	Greater London
Wigan	Metropolitan Borough	North West
Wolverhampton	Metropolitan Borough	West Midlands



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