

Maidstone Borough Council Digital Strategy 2022-2025

About the Digital Strategy

We want the Borough of Maidstone to be a vibrant, prosperous, urban and rural community at the heart of Kent, where everyone can realise their potential.

This vision is set out in our [strategic plan](#) and our digital strategy supports the achievement of that vision and the whole Council's goals, by re-imagining how we design, deliver and operate our services in the internet age. It explains what we're going to do to make Maidstone a truly digital council and borough over the next three years and beyond.

Digital is not just about delivering a list of activities or implementing new technology. As much as anything digital is a mindset. It's about being user-centred and adaptive and is an enabler of everything the Council is doing.

The strategy builds on our commitment to the [Local Digital Declaration](#), creating an environment of flexibility, creativity and innovation so our people can thrive and provide excellent user centred services to the public. It also explains how we will support the Borough of Maidstone, its residents and businesses to realise the full benefits of the internet age.

What we aim to achieve

If we successfully deliver this strategy over the next three years, we will have achieved:

- A fundamentally better customer experience of interacting with the Council. People will be able to get what they want, the first time they try, and not need multiple touch points to do simple tasks
- A better understanding of our residents, through the better use of joined-up data, using modern technology to join data sets and get insights which allow us to continuously improve our services and make better decisions.
- Happier, more productive staff, working flexibly, who are equipped with all the technology they need to do their jobs and work from anywhere
- More efficient processes that optimise technology to give customers what they need quickly and free up staff time from low value repetitive tasks
- A reduction in digital exclusion – more people getting the support they need

- A positive impact on our climate commitment

What we mean by Digital

The word digital is understood and interpreted in lots of ways. We use this definition in the public sector to describe what we mean by digital:

“Digital means applying the culture, processes, business models & technologies of the internet era to respond to people’s raised expectations”

Tom Loosemore – Co-founder of the Government Digital Service

Good practice and guidance

We have used these central government resources to inform our digital priorities and the way we organise and deliver digital projects.

- [Technology Code of Practice](#)
- [Government Service Standard](#)
- [Governance principles for agile service delivery](#)
- [Government Functional Standard](#)
- [Local Digital Declaration](#)

Where are we now?

The Council is already relatively advanced in its digital journey. Our first digital strategy was published all the way back in 2011, and was then built on and combined with the concept of introducing customer-centred digital-first design across all customer-facing services, in our transformative Customer Service Improvement Strategy 2013-16. This was then followed by our [2018-2021 Digital Strategy](#).

Face to face enquiries have fallen 99% since 2013, with calls to the contact centre reducing 60% in the same period. This has been made possible by improving services generally and meeting customer demand for high quality digital services. In 2020 there were 2.4m visits to the Council's website maidstone.gov.uk, where we provide more than 100 online services for people to self-serve 24/7; around 192,000 online transactions were completed in 2021. The ten most popular online services have a digital take up of more than 80%.

Our ability to pivot and respond to the Coronavirus pandemic, delivering new services rapidly through the use of agile methods and shifting to almost full homeworking overnight were just some of the positives in a difficult and challenging period. This has been possible because of the work completed during our previous [Digital Strategy for 2018-2021](#) which includes:

- Signing the [Local Digital Declaration](#), a public pledge along with hundreds of other councils to meet high standards for our technology and digital services and adopt digital culture and ways of working
- Creating a Digital and Transformation board, chaired by the Chief Executive to ensure digital transformation, data and technology decisions are made at a high level by the right people from across the Council
- Meeting the required accessibility standards for our main Council website and being the first public sector organisation to obtain a score of 100 for website accessibility from SOCITM in 2021
- Introducing an in-house self-scan document submission service for our customers
- Implementing Skype for business for all our people – staff and members
- Using techniques and toolkits to increase capability for agile project delivery and user-centred service design
- Converting the process for garden waste subscribers away from paper invoices to digital-first, ensuring all subscribers were registered and could easily pay their subscription, and any bins that were no longer required by households were collected for re-use.

- Designing a number of processes at pace to support the work of the Council's community hub, which helped those who needed assistance during the pandemic, being agile and changing these in the face of the very fluid environment in which the Council was working
- Continuously improving the ability of staff to be able to access the network seamlessly, just as if they were in the office, throughout the COVID-19 pandemic
- Increasing the use of business intelligence through Microsoft Power BI, building dashboards so teams can access real time information to understand service performance and use this to make key decisions on service design and provision
- Making use of information using Oneview, so that we were able to predict who was likely to become homeless and intervene early to prevent this – of the group of households at risk of becoming homeless the team worked with, less than 1% became homeless, compared with 40% of the households the team were unable to contact due to a lack of capacity.

Vision, Workstreams, Principles and Approach to delivery

Vision and workstreams

We will be an agile and data driven Council, using the best of modern digital design, technology and ways of working to deliver excellent user-centred services that make a difference to the lives of our residents.

We will achieve this through 5 workstreams led by different officers across the Council. The Head of Transformation and Property will act as the overall senior lead for the whole strategy and programme of work. The workstreams and lead officers are as follows:

Workstream 1: Provide simple, accessible, end-to-end services that are easy to use and based around users' needs - Transformation and Digital Services Manager

Workstream 2: Giving our people the tools they need to do their jobs - ICT Programme Manager

Workstream 3: Making data work for us - Corporate Insight, Communities and Governance Manager

Workstream 4: Digital inclusion - Head of Policy, Communications and Governance

Workstream 5: Creating a digital culture across the Council – Head of Transformation and Property

The digital landscape changes quickly, and digital strategy documents can date even faster. Therefore, this strategy sets out a high level framework for where we're going and how we'll move forwards over the next few years.

Our Principles and approach to delivery

The following principles will guide all of our digital, data and technology transformation work as we deliver across our 5 workstreams.

1. A continuous focus on meeting user needs

We exist to meet the needs of our users. Service transformation will focus on meeting the needs of our residents, particularly those who are most vulnerable. We will use research and data to better understand needs in our borough and will use this to build

and develop products and services to meet those needs. We will design services that take into account all users of a service, including our internal teams, but the end user - our customers - will always be our top priority.

We make sure our digital services are accessible to all users, including those with disabilities, and work to improve our digital inclusion and not leave anyone behind. We will test all services to make sure they are simple and intuitive, and support those who are unable or unwilling to go online.

2. Being data-led and basing our decisions on evidence

We will use the data we hold better. We will share better internally and share with partners and more openly where appropriate. Better use of data will support every aspect of our digital strategy. We will base our decisions on the insight gained through activities such as user research, service performance metrics, user feedback and other available evidence. We will prioritise projects and interventions based on evidence of what will deliver the best outcomes for users and best support the Council's medium term financial strategy.

3. Continuous development and improvement of our services and products

The needs and expectations of our customers and our staff change over time. No service or product is ever perfect; there are always improvements that can be made. We will embed the concept of continuous improvement into our work as much as our resources allow, putting working products into the hands of users early so we can test how well they work, providing us with the insight needed to improve them over time. We won't be afraid to experiment and fail, delete things that don't work, learn from them and try new approaches

4. Fast and effective agile project delivery

We learned a lot from having to design new services and deliver projects at pace during the pandemic. We will expand the use of agile project delivery and techniques, maximising collaborative working with staff and customers, delivering products in several iterations or incremental steps, as well as making sure the right people at the right level are available to make decisions in a timely fashion and waiting for decisions does not slow down delivery. This will ensure that benefits from a project begin to be released throughout the process rather than just at the end.

5. Working in the open

In line with our commitments in the Local Digital Declaration, we will aim to work as openly as we can on all our projects. This means we make key digital and transformation decisions corporately rather than in silos and tell our people internally

about what we are doing and engage with them about digital improvements. Externally we will learn from others and what has worked elsewhere and we will share our ideas widely to get feedback and suggestions. Where we can, we will share code, learning and other products we create, enabling others to benefit from our efforts. This helps us to do better work, as it creates a much bigger community around what we are doing than just an internal audience.

“A truly digital Council will be more connected and integrated, using digital to reimagine service delivery that is user-centric and meets users’ needs – with citizens, communities and businesses reaping the benefits.”

Council of the Future: A digital guide for Councillors – Tech UK 2018

Workstream 1: Provide simple, accessible, end-to-end services that are easy to use and based around users' needs

People expect Council services to be online, easy to find and simple to use on the device of their choice. Services should be digital by default, and meet the highest accessibility standards, with support through traditional channels for those unable or unwilling to use them.

We will design services around the needs of the user and not just the back office. We will do the hard work as part of designing the process to make it simple so customers only do the minimum necessary to achieve the outcome they need in the most cost-effective way possible.

We must be channel agnostic, understanding that being digital extends beyond a set of online processes on a website, to ensure people can access our services through the channel of their choice.

People will increasingly access information and services on platforms other than maidstone.gov.uk. This might be directly through search engines or voice assistants. We want to make sure that we structure our content so it can be accessed through those different channels.

The intended outcomes for this workstream are:

- More services are online with more residents and businesses choosing to use them.
- Services are simple, seamless and end to end, and designed around users' needs so they get what they want first time and without multiple touch points or needing to ask for help
- The Council's website is always available and the information on there is accurate, up to date and easy to find
- Our online services and information are easier to find and use and meet the highest accessibility standards.
- Our services are value for money and available through a wider range of channels that better reflect customer expectation and latest technology innovations
- We provide greater value for money services by taking advantage of more shared or open-source government platforms and products

To achieve this we will:

- Improve the availability of maidstone.gov.uk and sub-domains by moving them to the cloud
- Introduce ways of further improving the accessibility of maidstone.gov.uk and the Council's other websites

- Introduce methods of increasing the accuracy of [maidstone.gov.uk](https://www.maidstone.gov.uk) contents including the use of automated, time-based prompts for content review
- Take opportunities, like the re-procurement of a major contract or the launch of a round of funding from central government, to improve end to end digital services, working with partners as required
- Build on our Agile and Service Design methods to include Product Management principles to enable continuous development throughout the lifecycle of our digital products and services
- Use data and insights to create a prioritised action list to improve the usability of our existing digital services, focusing initially on any areas of poor resident experience
- Explore different channels for customer contact, including web chat, automated web chat and voice assistants to ensure we are ready to use them when necessary to meet the changing needs of residents
- Explore using structured data markup schema.org to improve and expand the availability of services and information beyond [maidstone.gov.uk](https://www.maidstone.gov.uk), making content available directly in other platforms such as search engine results and google assistant
- Harness the power of automation in customer services delivery, including voice automation, to reduce the administrative burden and improve services to customers
- Set out the roadmap to adopting and expanding the use of more shared and open-source platforms and systems, including LocalGov Drupal, Gov Notify and GovPay
- Review how to make the best use of customer accounts to improve the customer experience
- Continue to reduce the use of paper, postage and unstructured emails in our interactions with customers
- Ensure that any new technologies, including artificial intelligence and process automation, are incorporated into processes in the right way, through end-to-end service design.

Workstream 2: Giving our people the tools they need to do their jobs

We have worked hard on giving our people – members and staff – the kit, IT systems and processes they need to work effectively from anywhere. We now want to build on our successes by getting systems to connect where required, building tools for storage, collaboration and business intelligence through the roll out of Microsoft 365, as well as ensuring that our people have the right devices for their jobs. We also want to ensure that our technology infrastructure supports our zero carbon ambitions.

Much of what is planned is covered in the ICT Strategy 2019-2024, which sets out how Mid-Kent ICT can support all partner authorities, including Maidstone, to deliver their digital ambitions.

The intended outcomes for this workstream are:

- Our people can work effectively from anywhere, having the systems and secure access they need to do their jobs
- Our people have the appropriate devices to perform their roles effectively.
- Colleagues can collaborate and co-author documents, avoiding duplication and delays associated with multiple copies of the same document.
- Our people can get the information they need about the Council and will interact with digitally with us and with each other
- Data is organised so that it can be used easily to enhance corporate and team knowledge of service performance
- Our systems integrate and are enablers of process change that removes unnecessary manual intervention
- Our cloud-hosting services use renewable energy to support our zero carbon ambitions

To achieve this we will:

- Move away from personal home drives and shared document folders, instead using Teams, OneDrive and SharePoint to create, manage, share and secure data and documents
- Simplify remote access to applications and data that remains in our on-site data centre.
- Implement a mobile working platform to support effective field working for all teams that need this.
- Review applications, roles and processes to pick the right device for the job and the person.
- Replace the remote access system with a new version that presents Windows 10 on any device from any location.
- Review the use of the intranet alongside enterprise social tools like Yammer, looking at how best to store and disseminate information about the Council and seeking opportunities to engage better with our people, and for them to engage better with each other
- Utilise methods like a data warehouse to organise and store data in a way that is easily accessible to business intelligence tools.
- Identify opportunities for and pilot the use of automation and artificial intelligence, learning lessons for initial projects and rolling this out further if successful
- Use application programming interfaces (APIs) and automation tools to join process steps from customer contact through to the back office and field workers on mobile devices.
- Move documents into Microsoft 365: the Microsoft cloud will be using 100% renewable energy from 2025.
- Assess the green credentials of our current suppliers' cloud arrangements and introduce a cloud first approach to procurement so that Software as a Service (SaaS) options are evaluated with zero-carbon in mind rather than just cost
- Ensure members can easily access email and documents securely from their devices by rolling out Microsoft Outlook and Teams and providing guidance on how best to use these applications

Workstream 3: Making data work for us

Data is hugely important to us, the information that we gather as part of our daily business, enables us to understand our past performance and current position, but also plan for the future. Data helps us understand our local area and make important decisions that will improve the lives of our local communities.

We are committed to being open and transparent about how we work, our decision-making processes and the services we provide. Making more data available will enable residents and businesses to access information about their area, their community, and the services they access.

We recognise that our departments often work in silos of data, which means that opportunities for insight can often be missed because the data is hard to analyse, isn't shared within the Council and or with other public services, or isn't unavailable to us.

The better the data we have the more chance we have in ensuring that services are more targeted and effective, that we allocate resources to where they will have the biggest impact, we save officer time in front and back-office processes, and to provide insight into the issues affecting our local area.

The COVID-19 pandemic has meant we are having to make harder decisions at a time when we are unclear of the full impact on our communities. It has also given us the opportunity to be more agile in the way we work as a Council and with data, and we have been able to swiftly develop new skills and demonstrate how essential working with partners to share data is to making informed decisions.

Whatever actions we take moving forward we are committed to always ensuring; data protection principles guide our actions; the data is secure, well organised and fit for purpose and the right people with the right skills are involved.

The intended outcomes for this workstream are:

- Every team has the real time information needed to effectively plan and deliver services, set out in a way that makes it easy to understand and use
- Our data is freely available for anyone to use, whenever this is possible
- We engage with our residents better
- Our people are empowered to share data within and outside the organisation where we can legally do this
- We understand our residents and whole customer base and are able to report and draw on this information to make informed decisions

- We use the better information we have to make design services around our users that are more personalised, streamlined and efficient
- The burden for staff of dealing with information requests is reduced

To achieve this we will:

- Design an open data website and deliver a programme of work to publish more data
- Undertake a dashboard development programme, working with every team to set up dashboards containing the information they need
- Review the performance management framework
- Ensure that information and record management is at the heart of Microsoft 365 migration project
- Work with key partners on opportunities to collect and share data with service improvement and data protection in mind
- Review how we deliver analytics across the organisation to ensure we are making the best use of our resources
- Build on the work done using predictive analytics to prevent people becoming homeless, exploring where this can be used in other areas to benefit residents and businesses

Workstream 4: Digital inclusion

Large parts of the digital strategy are focused on how the Council operates and makes greater use of digital technology and new ways of working to deliver modern user centered services to the residents and businesses of the Borough. But there is also a vital role for the Council in facilitating improvements within the Borough and in people's lives through digital technology and better use of data.

This is increasingly important as we seek to support the borough and its residents and businesses in recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as ongoing challenges from rapid growth and the climate crisis.

Anecdotal evidence from our community and voluntary sector partners suggests that much of the challenge for residents locally is not only financial barriers to access digital services (i.e. pay as you go phones, no access to free internet) but also confidence in using and accessing digital services for services that residents see as official or important. They may, for example, be confident using facebook online but not so confident when it comes to paying bills or filling out forms to request services, preferring to do these on paper.

Through analysis of census returns by ward, we know that Shepway and Parkwood had the lowest percentage of online returns, suggesting that people in these areas are more likely to be digitally excluded or lack confidence online. We will use this sort of information to target digital inclusions interventions and help to where it is most needed and will have the biggest benefit.

The intended outcomes for this workstream are:

- Data is used to proactively predict where interventions can have a positive impact
- All residents and businesses have access to decent broadband
- Residents are confident/have the right skills and support to access and use digital services.

To achieve this we will:

- Use available data to understand the extent of digital exclusion in Maidstone following the impact of Covid-19 and to map the existing provision of access and support.

- Continue our work across the borough with third sector and community groups and charities to ensure people can access training and resources easily for example through our network and the community resilience fund.
- Deliver the following actions as set out in our Economic Development Strategy:
 - Ensure that local residents – in particular young people - can access skills and employability support including specific opportunities for re-training, business start-up, and developing digital/e-commerce competencies
 - Work with Kent County Council (KCC) to ensure the roll out of high quality digital connectivity across the Borough's rural communities to facilitate access to home working, e-commerce and learning opportunities, particularly as virtual working and learning becomes a part of the 'new normal' following Covid-19
 - Pilot a digital inclusion programme in Maidstone to engage people with community-based learning, offering digital skills as part of a package of support based on an individual's need)
- Take an evidence-based approach to supporting the KCC Digital Strategy on Digital Inclusion (i.e. through supporting its assessment of Maidstone's needs with our own intelligence, Census data, LSOAs, complimentary projects that could support sustainability of funding opportunities). Funding (via KCC) is available for a number of projects that dovetail with our own ambitions
- Involve the Councillor access to services members group to keep a watching brief on digital inclusion and be the sounding board for the digital inclusion workstream

Workstream 5: Creating a digital culture across the Council

Digital is more than just technology or even having central digital and IT teams who work to improve systems and processes. Digital is about people as much as technology. It is both a corporate culture and an individual mindset, giving the ability for everyone to incorporate technology into their daily roles and take value from it and creating the conditions for genuine organisational transformation to occur.

It is important that all our people have a digital mindset and that the Council has a digital culture. We have a good track record in this and we are seeking to build on our progress to further embed digital leadership and user-focussed thinking, as well as giving our people the knowledge and skills they need to make the best use of new and existing systems.

We will continue to learn from others and will share our learning across the Mid-Kent Service partnership and in the wider public sector and digital community.

The intended outcomes for this workstream are:

- We have a visible and shared organisational vision of digital and what it takes to be a digital Council
- Our shared ICT team and Maidstone-only Transformation and Digital teams work together and with individual services to deliver true digital change
- The principles of the Local Digital Declaration are fully integrated into our decision making around systems and digital issues
- Our people have the digital skills, knowledge and confidence they need to do their jobs
- All of our staff understand services don't stay still, and constantly look for opportunities to improve service delivery
- Our senior managers are fully committed to and personify a digital mindset

To achieve this we will:

- Ensure digital is reflected in our current review of organisational culture
- Make sure communication and training is a key part of our roll-out of Microsoft 365
- Strengthen our guidance and support for teams when they procure ICT systems

- Work in the open across the Council to ensure all teams understand the improvements and innovation going on across the Council and how this could benefit their services
- Improve senior manager understanding of the Local Digital Declaration
- Identify, train and upskill a number of officers across the organisation, allowing them to support colleagues with IT systems and how to get the best out of the technology available to them
- Roll out refresher training on user-focussed service design
- Create and constantly review a roadmap of corporate technology and digital projects so our people can easily understand what is coming up and what this means for them

How we'll measure progress and success

We have listed the outcomes we want to delivery under each of the 5 workstreams. These outcomes should deliver the following benefits, which we will measure to track progress towards delivery of our digital vision.

- Higher percentage of total demand met through digital self-service, both overall and for each Council service.
- Increased capacity in the customer services team by reducing the number of customer enquiries that have to be answered by staff
- Reduced failure demand across the Council, meaning customers have to contact the Council less to report things that go wrong or to chase for progress updates
- Reduced officer time spent on back office processing, through better systems integration and automation
- Reduced paper usage, helping to meet the Council's climate commitments
- Improved customer services for those looking for the most common services, indicated by customer satisfaction
- Reduced Council carbon footprint from better use of technology and greener cloud-hosting
- Improved public opinion on how easy it is to access our services
- Happy, productive staff who have the right technology, measured by those who say they have the tools they need to do their job