Middlesbrough
moving forward

DIGITAL STRATEGY

2018-22

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Introduction

In June 2015, Executive approved a corporate Customer Strategy for the period 2015-2018. This strategy effectively exploited digital solutions to achieve its objectives, improving customer experience while delivering significant ‘channel shift’ to digital platforms for high-volume customer transactions.

However, all of our fundamental tasks depend on digital technologies, and the Council as an organisation has not yet fully exploited the opportunities provided by digital to support the achievement of *all* of our objectives. If we can achieve this, the benefits to our customers, our partners and our employees will be exponential.

This strategy therefore aims to deploy digital solutions in a systematic manner to underpin the delivery of all of the Council’s strategic priorities for Middlesbrough. It aims to make digital integral to the Council’s overall approach, creating awareness of the potential of digital and a consensus that ‘analogue’ approaches are to be challenged and removed, wherever this appropriate and practicable.

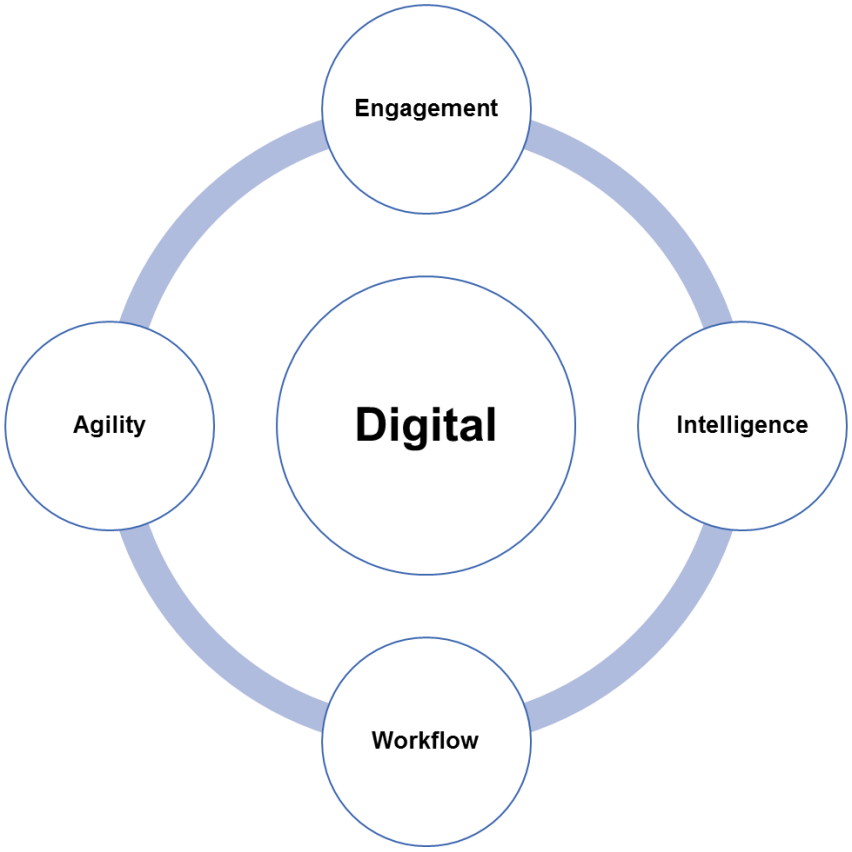
The approach set out within this strategy has been informed by the UK Government’s Transformation Strategy, national research on the digitisation of local government services, benchmarking with other public sector organisations, and consultation with all Directorates. The strategy comprises:

- our vision for digital, and the anticipated benefits;
- the relationship between a digital Council and a digital Middlesbrough;
- a potential approach to ‘assisted digital’ i.e. addressing digital exclusion;
- a summary of the strategic themes, and priorities over the next four years; and
- key measures of success.

Vision

Our vision is that by 2022 we will be a digital organisation that fully exploits digital solutions for the benefit of all of our communities, supporting the delivery of the Mayor's Vision for Middlesbrough.

Digital solutions will allow us to better **engage** with our citizens, involving them in co-producing outcomes; manage and marshal our data effectively and securely, analyse it to provide business **intelligence**, use this to optimise our **workflow**, and ultimately bring organisational **agility**, enabling us to respond rapidly to change.



These are the four interrelated themes of our strategy, which will apply to the whole organisation at all levels, and are iterative, to drive continuous improvement.

The cashable productivity gains from the effective implementation of digital solutions are well-established, and this strategy assumes a minimum £1.8m saving to the Council will be delivered by 2022. In addition this, however, digital will support the delivery of the Council's strategic aims, and drive the transformation of business practice within the organisation in line with the Council's corporate values and desired operating model, contributing to:

- Customer excellence
- Improved information governance
- Improved commissioning practice
- Increased commerciality
- Reduced operational estate
- Enhanced collaboration
- Improved reputation.

Digital Council – Digital Middlesbrough

There is a clear relationship between our ambitions for a digital organisation and our ambitions for a digital Middlesbrough.

Middlesbrough has a developing, nationally-recognised digital cluster, fostered over an extended period by the Council and Teesside University via the Digital City initiatives.

Now operated solely by Teesside University, Digital City has recently published *Digital City – Catalyst for Growth*, setting out strategic priorities and high-level interventions in line with the Tees Valley Combined Authority's Strategic Economic Plan.

We will support the ongoing development of the sector through the provision of infrastructure, including townwide broadband, and wraparound business support services. And we will aim to connect local people to high-value job opportunities within the digital sector as part of our Social Regeneration Prospectus. We will also explore joint-working with the town's digital businesses to further our organisational transformation and resolve social challenges.

As part of our strategy, the Council will also develop a strategic approach to 'Smarter Cities' and the 'Internet of Things' (the use of sensors, GPS technology and wearables) to collect data and analyse and resolve complex problems (for example, in relation to waste, traffic flow, and infrastructure).

Digital exclusion and assisted digital

While the UK Government and its public services are amongst the most digitally advanced in the world, digital exclusion (lack of access to the internet at home) remains a significant issue nationally, and particularly amongst those from disadvantaged groups. It is currently estimated that 15% of the UK population are digitally excluded – it can be assumed that this figure is higher for Middlesbrough.

The 'assisted digital' are those people needing some assistance to interact with public services online in order to provide basic information, make a payment, and provide detailed information. The assisted digital population includes all of those who are digitally excluded and is currently estimated at 37% of the UK population.

In addition, a significant proportion of local government services (not least in budgetary terms) are clearly more difficult to digitise because they rely on face-to-face interaction and are about fostering connections between people.

The above position is mirrored in the business community. While the great majority of major businesses are more digitised than services within the public sector, assisted digital is at 29% within micro-businesses, and at 42% amongst the self-employed with no employees.

Therefore, while acknowledging that this position will improve significantly with time, as people become more familiar with technology and today's children and young people become tomorrow's service users, it is important that our strategy assumes a realistic approach, proportionate to present local circumstances and capabilities. The approach adopted will therefore be 'digital by design', rather than 'digital by default', to ensure that

digital solutions are used only where appropriate, and no customer is unduly disadvantaged by digital transformation.

Building on achievements to date (including assisted digital provision within the recently-opened Middlesbrough Customer Centre), and working with our partners, we will develop an approach to digital exclusion and assisted digital that it is bespoke to Middlesbrough's communities. This is likely to include:

- continued provision of face-to-face and telephone support for relevant services, with exclusively-digital services only introduced where appropriate;
- provision of free wifi in public places, and self-serve terminals in the Customer Centre and Community Hubs, with staff support for customers;
- improvements to the Council's website to include help pages, live chat, video chat, and auto-translation, and improvements to the Council's mobile site;
- smoothing the pathways between digital and other service channels to ensure customers are naturally directed to less costly channels; and
- a digital outreach programme supporting residents and SMEs, which will include direct support in setting up digital transactions, signposting to training and (potentially) the provision of IT equipment from the Council's obsolete stock.

Themes and priorities

The following sections summarise our priorities under each theme of the strategy.

Engagement

Digital solutions are hugely effective at finding, engaging and mobilising communities around issues, by informing and consulting; involving and collaborating; and empowering. These are the core offerings of some of the most valuable digital companies in the world, mostly obviously Facebook.

Our priorities within this theme are:

- We will have a clear and continuously updated view of customer engagement preferences and customer views on Middlesbrough and Council services. Customers will be engaged appropriately and consistently in line with a revised corporate Marketing and Communications Strategy.

- We will have a much more interactive relationship with communities through the introduction of a Digital Citizens Panel, engaging communities in policy and service design, and allowing 'in-time' feedback on service performance. We will use this and other means to involve our customers in testing our digital solutions before they are launched, to ensure they are fit-for-purpose.

- We will present a clear and consistent brand image across all channels. Our website will evolve into a 'digital platform', customising content for each user to provide a more interactive, personal experience comparable with the best non-public sector digital services. Our intranet will evolve in a similar manner.

- The majority of customers (residents and businesses) will have a MyMiddlesbrough account, through which they can access information, fulfil service requests, access correspondence sent to them by the Council, record their communication preferences and update personal information. The potential of digital volunteering through this mechanism will also be explored.

Intelligence

Data is now considered the world's most valuable resource, and releases the potential for an 'analogue' organisation to move towards the digital model and create value (whether financial or non-financial).

'Big data' brings significant complexity that cannot be managed with simple tools. Business intelligence (BI) solutions enable organisations to collect data from systems, analyse it and visualise it, helping them to make more informed business decisions. BI helps us understand what is happening, why this is happening, what might happen next and what we should do about it.

Our priorities within this theme are:

- We will develop an 'asset-based' Information Strategy that will be the key driver for data exploitation, promoting transparency, openness and collaboration, as well as compliance and data security. The strategy will include a map of all organisational data

sets and their relationships, and a defined (and enforced) approach to data management including standards for data formats, retention and use, with clear data quality approaches. All currently relevant data will be stored and be accessible electronically.

- We will agree and implement a robust, 'by default', and automated approach to data sharing with our partners to support collaborative planning, commissioning and service design.

- We will open up our data, publishing as much as practicable via an open data portal and make this available on data.gov.uk, and invite social entrepreneurs, communities and other parties to use the information to help us develop new approaches to solving social, economic and environmental problems.

- We will develop a master data management platform that will allow us to have a single version of the truth, and act as a basis for effective business intelligence, and exploit the use of indexes, such as a Citizen Index.

- We will improve our Geographical Information Systems, address and location data to effectively support business intelligence and mobile working.

- We will make Business Intelligence dashboards available for all services, and ensure that they are routinely used to manage service performance, forecast future events and drive decision-making. As such they will replace the traditional model of performance management, focused on the periodic monitoring of KPI targets.

Workflow

The financial benefits of digitising workflow are well-known – SOCITM has estimated the average cost of digital transactions to be £0.15, compared with telephone and face-to-face costs of £2.83 and £8.62 respectively.

Our priorities within this theme are:

- We will have oversight of all of our processes through a corporate process inventory, which is routinely updated and supports quality management approaches.

- We will continue to simplify services for customers, partners and suppliers, moving all *appropriate* transactions online, and automating our back office – significantly reducing administration costs. Digital will become customers' preferred method of interaction with the Council, due to ease of use and effectiveness. In line with the Government's Transformation Strategy, this could involve greater integration with national platforms and solutions such as verify and .gov.uk.

- We will provide similar functionality for our managers and employees, digitising a wide range of transactions, in line with the self-serve ethos of the Middlesbrough Manager and Employee.

Agility

Multi-agency working and increasing integration of services will in the near future become the norm for local authorities. The Council has acknowledged this in making 'partnerships

and integration' a key theme of the third phase of its Change Programme, and has begun to take action to position itself for the opportunities provided by collaborative working.

Our priorities within this theme are:

- We will be a highly networked organisation, working closely with a large number of partners, suppliers and innovators, and with our local communities. We will be a default commissioner of outcomes, and an effective enabler, connecting people with the best services for them.

- Our employees will have anytime, anyplace access to the tools and information they need, regardless of location or device. We will provide them with the right devices and digital solutions to ensure that they can collaborate much more effectively, with each other and with partners.

- Services and teams will be more easily configurable, in line with our priorities, and able to rapidly form temporary structures, with other organisations as appropriate, in response to specific local challenges. Increasingly, we will share resources (space, technology, equipment, time) with partners, businesses and residents.

Benefits

The benefits of digitisation to local authorities, and to local communities, are very significant. Nesta's report, Connected Councils: A Digital Vision of Local Government in 2025 (March 2016) estimates that (based on replicating then best-in-class examples across all services) digitisation could save unitary local authorities between 2-13% of their annual expenditure by 2025. The types of benefits achievable (in order of ambition) are described as follows:

Approach	Examples	Types of benefit
Automate individual processes	Reporting an issue, requesting a service, booking appointments, making payments,	Economies of trimming (efficiency savings).
Digitise processes across the Council	Implementing cloud-based software for all employees, digital helpdesk, digitising processes end-to-end.	Economies of flow.
Digitise organisation	Aggregating back office and combining multiple functions, reusing digital solutions across Directorates.	Economies of scale and scope.
Business model built around digital platform	Replacing traditional management with peer-to-peer or crowdsourced accountability.	Economies of visibility and responsibility.

This strategy assumes a £1.8m minimum saving to the Council will be delivered from digital solutions by 2022, predicated largely on the continued digitisation of customer transactions and back office, and a corresponding reduction in expenditure resulting from channel shift and new ways of working.

This assumption stands at around 33% of the savings pace envisaged by Nesta, which is realistic given the Council's starting position and the likely level of digital exclusion in Middlesbrough. There will undoubtedly be further cashable savings opportunities as the strategy and its underpinning programme is developed.

From a statutory perspective, digitisation will enable to Council to deliver more for less, in line with the Duty of Best Value, and to more effectively meet its many legal duties in relation to information governance and information sharing, including those set out with the Digital Economy Act 2017 and the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) to be implemented in the UK from May 2018.

In addition this, however, digital will also directly support the Council's ambitions for transforming its business and for physical and social regeneration within Middlesbrough. The principal benefit of digitisation is likely to be the enabling the collation and analysis of data from both within the Council and from third parties to improve decision-making and solve complex problems.

Measures of success

If we are successful in delivering our priorities, we will see sustained improvements in the following measures of our performance up to and beyond 2022. We will report our progress regularly on our website, adding measures as information becomes available.

- Increased brand awareness (website hits and social media followers)
- Improved SOCITM rating of website to better than unitary average on all criteria
- Increased number and usage of MyMiddlesbrough accounts
- Increased stakeholder involvement in policy and service design
- Improved reputation and resident satisfaction
- Reduced missing data, data record errors and duplicate data
- Improved time to access and correct data
- Reduced number of data breaches
- Maximised publication of Council data using open data standards
- Reduced number and time to respond to FoI requests
- Increased utilisation of dashboards by management population
- Improved performance (financial and non-financial) attributable to BI
- Increased accuracy of forecasting across Directorates attributable to BI
- Increased customer transactions completed online, and reduced telephone contacts
- Increased employee transactions completed through digital solutions
- Improved first time resolution of all customer requests (internal and external)
- Reduced costs per transaction (headcount, telephones, printing, stationery, mail etc)
- Increased proportion of IT-dependent employees that are agile workers
- Increased proportion of services that are delivered collaboratively
- Reduced size of corporate office estate and associated costs
- Reduced employee mileage costs.