

Information Technology and Digital Strategy

2022-2026



Foreword from the Leader

Our IT and digital services underpin everything we do.

They provide gateways for our residents and businesses who are increasingly turning to digital routes to access our services and manage their business with us, and they provide our officers with the tools to support and serve our communities.

We pride ourselves on being a listening and accessible council, and digital channels and reliable and secure IT networks make it quick and easy for our residents to reach us.

Recent years have seen the way the world works change dramatically, and both public and private sector organisations have had to integrate new systems and technologies quickly to keep pace and adapt.

All that we learned in that period of great flux has helped shape this strategy which ensures this organisation is in a position to grow and evolve its crucial systems and networks.

This IT and Digital Strategy sets out clearly how we will deliver continual improvements to our service, ensuring it is now and will remain fit for purpose and is able to adapt to changes in both technology and demand.

Through its adoption we are ensuring this authority has the IT and Digital capability to support our many and varied service teams in delivering a Gravesham to be proud of.

Cllr John Burden

Leader of the Executive



Introduction

Corporate Plan

The Corporate Plan has set out the scale of the council's ambition and the core objectives and commitments required in *delivering a Gravesham to be proud of*. To be successful, it is vital that all corporate policies, strategies, and business plans are fully informed, designed and resourced to support the delivery of our corporate objectives. The Information Technology and Digital Strategy will underpin and support these objectives as part of the 'Golden Thread', a continuous cycle connecting the corporate aims, policy framework and delivery plans of the council, with the actions of Members, officers, and partners at all levels.

Information Technology and Digital Together

Information Technology is the infrastructure used by the council. It is the computers, communication systems (phone and email), business applications, networks, and the officers that support those layers.

Digital on the other hand is how we utilise the Information Technology to deliver services to employees, customers, and other stakeholders online.

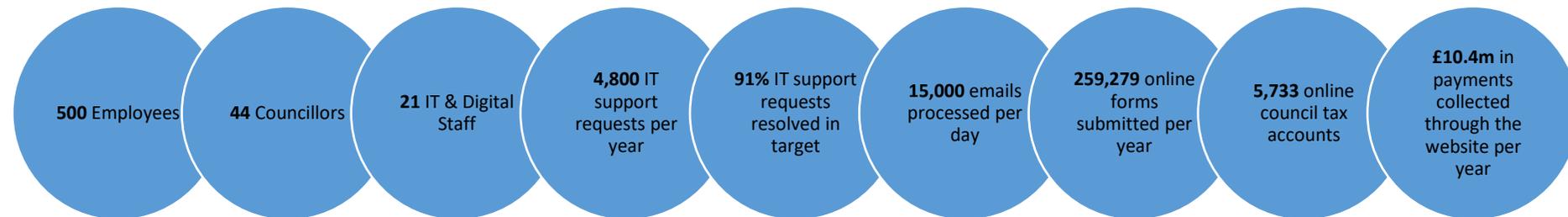
This strategy recognises the intrinsic link between Information Technology and Digital disciplines and brings them together to present a cohesive vision and set of objectives centred around two goals – transforming how Information Technology systems are used and reshaping how the Information Technology function provides its services.

The target audience of this strategy is therefore both internal to the council (Members and officers) and external (customers and other stakeholders),



Understanding the Current Service

Gathering relevant information about the current service enables us to better target our resources and make fully informed decisions when designing change for service improvement. Below are a few headline statistics on where we are now.



Embracing Change

The working environment and how we deliver our services to customers has changed significantly since early 2020. Necessity brought rapid change around remote working, and any concerns expressed in the past about the effectiveness of a workforce not tied to an office were proven wrong. This latest Information Technology and Digital Strategy comes at a pivotal time when we can lean in on the benefits brought about by large scale remote working, fully embrace the changes, and design a future where work is smarter, and the benefits can filter down to our customers.

In recognition of the changing landscape, the IT Service has undergone a significant review to ensure the delivery of this strategy is achievable. The Digital and IT teams have been aligned under a single Service Manager to ensure back-office technology supports front line services in a joined-up way, and agile project management can be embedded in everything we do.

Our vision is to provide a flexible working environment for staff which enables services to be delivered from any location at any time without technology being an impediment. Our services will be joined up and efficient, providing an excellent user experience for our customers whilst meeting their demands.



Plan on a page

Ambitions

Improve digital capability

Accelerate channel shift

Working smarter

Innovation

Principles

Accessibility

Secure by default

Concentrate on information, not infrastructure

Any device, anywhere, anytime

Buy, don't build

Information Technology Self Service

Technology confidence in the wider workforce

Objectives

Supporting a flexible organisation

Cloud migration

Improving data quality through standards

Enabling use of data analytics and business intelligence

Growing digital capability

Reducing duplicated functionality

Continual improvement of information security



Our Ambitions

We have four ambitions we are aiming to deliver over the course of this strategy.

1. Improve digital capability

Services delivered digitally are no use unless those delivering and consuming the services have the confidence, skills and knowledge with the technology being used. Investment and training in digital skills for council officers, members and residents will be crucial for the successful rollout of new services. We will ensure that officers within the council are provided with the information and support required for the use of modern technology, and council members are provided with an effective training programme to take advantage of new facilities available for their role with the council and constituents. We will work with other partnership organisations to support residents and ensure policies and assistance is in place to address digital inclusion.

2. Accelerate channel shift

The foundations put in place because of this strategy will assist the adoption of new digitally delivered services. Providing a good customer experience in a way that is convenient to the service user will drive our programme forward. We will ensure that the replacement and upgrade of back-office systems provides the opportunity to improve the digital delivery of services.

3. Working smarter

Smarter working empowers us all to make the right decisions about where, when, and how we work. By optimising the use of workplace and technology, we can improve productivity through a focus on outputs and enable a better work life balance for all. Council officers and members will be provided with modern, fit for purpose digital tools to enable them to carry out their work in the most efficient way. Working with technology should be a pleasure rather than a hindrance. We will consult with stakeholders to understand the requirements and preferences of end users to ensure we are providing the correct hardware and software.

4. Innovation

Innovation cannot come without creativity. We will nurture and embrace ways to discover opportunities for work to be done better, differently and in new ways. Innovation not only has a role to play in our own quest for efficiency and productivity but also in the wider context of action required to mitigate climate change through human activity.



Our Principles

When delivering this strategy, we will be led by the following guiding principles.

1. **Accessibility**

Our services should be accessible by all, and digital services must be designed with this in mind. Consideration should be given to users dependent upon assistive technology for to ensure they are provided with the best user experience while accessing council services. Digital inclusion should also be considered during the design process and appropriate measures put in place to ensure that the service can be accessed equally by all.

2. **Secure by default**

Council services (both back office and public facing) must be secure and not present a risk of cyber-attack or data breach. Modern encryption standards should be used to secure data and appropriate technical controls (such as multifactor authentication and security posture monitoring) should be as transparent and easy to use as possible. Creating security through complexity is a false economy and can lead to work arounds which are less secure.

3. **Concentrate on information, not infrastructure**

When designing new digital services, we will concentrate on the service itself rather than the infrastructure being used for delivery. By decoupling information from infrastructure, we remove a constraint which could compromise the outcome we are trying to achieve. We will put the customer at the heart of service design and build services around their needs.

4. **Any device, anywhere, anytime**

This principle applies to both customer access to council services, and staff access to back-office systems. We must embrace access to services from different types of devices irrespective of location and time of day.

For customers accessing council digital services, this will mean the service will work equally well on a desktop computer, laptop computer, tablet, or smartphone, irrespective of manufacturer or operating system.

For officers this will mean work can be done equally as well in the office or at home using a desktop or laptop computer, or out in the field using a laptop computer, tablet, or smartphone.



5. Buy, don't build

We need to use our staff resources wisely and developing bespoke software for a service where there is commodity off the shelf alternatives is not an effective use of resources. Our priority when assessing the best approach should be purchasing solutions before considering building them ourselves.

6. Information Technology Self Service

Digital services should be available for our own internal use in the same way we provide digital services for external customers. Self-service is an efficient way to use staff resources and provide a resilient and improved service which is always available whatever the time of day. We will proactively identify and implement areas where joined up self service solutions can assist with Information Technology service delivery.

7. Technology confidence in the wider workforce

We will support staff and provide relevant training to improve the confidence of the workforce in using technology. The role of project support officers in both the Microsoft 365 and Telephony projects has shown the benefits that support can bring to large corporate change projects. Adopting a similar approach for future projects will grow the confidence and capability of officers in using technology to the benefit of our services and customers.



Our Objectives

The objectives we aim to achieve through this strategy are as follows.

1. Supporting a flexible organisation

Now, more than ever, we need to be flexible in the way we deliver our services. Expectations by staff and our customers are higher than ever, and we need to meet these expectations by delivering appropriate, fit for purpose, technology solutions. By building on our hybrid work policy, we will provide a secure working environment which enables council operations to be delivered from any location at any time.

Our intended outcomes for this objective are:

- All council staff have access to work devices that as well as being modern, fit for purpose and help them do their jobs, are also easy and enjoyable to use.
- Council staff can work from anywhere (not including jobs which need to be done in a specific location, such as parks and open spaces), with an equally good experience. This includes reliable systems access, sufficient bandwidth and telephony, with the right assistive technology for those who need it.
- All corporately held collaboration tools are held in the cloud, meaning people can work together, share and store data efficiently no matter where they are.
- Our people feel confident using modern technology, are aware of its risks and opportunities, and can fully participate in agile delivery and service design.
- Staff can find the information they need about the council quickly and easily on the intranet.
- Our senior leadership exemplifies digital thinking, empowering their teams to get closer to resident experience and use technology to experiment.
- Customer outcomes will be improved via an empowered workforce using modern, fit for purpose technology.

To do this we will:

- Equip all staff who need it with a mobile device.
- Move to the cloud for all productivity tools and documents.
- Redesign our desktop estate and office layout to take account of the increased use of mobile devices.



- Use videoconferencing across our estate.
- Review current processes for providing assistive technology for staff with disabilities, ensuring we make the best use of available technology to support all our people.

2. Cloud migration

Many of our IT systems are now delivered via the cloud, and this transition will continue. When selecting cloud solutions, the order of preference continues to be;

1. Software as a Service
2. Platform as a Service
3. Infrastructure as a Service

Our aim is to have no on premise servers by 2026, with the majority of systems to be delivered via the cloud and any residual servers being hosted in an external data centre. By ceasing to host our own servers we leverage economies of scale for data centre energy usage and reduce greenhouse gas emissions, supporting the councils net zero carbon target of 2030.

Our intended outcomes for this objective are:

- We have full control over the data in all our back-office systems, and can extract and analyse that data to improve services
- Staff are not physically constrained in any way as to where or how they access systems and data
- We have a clear architectural vision and roadmap
- We have a cost-efficient and resilient technology estate, centrally managed and regularly reviewed to prove value for money
- Our people have a streamlined, intuitive, and seamless experience of line of business systems.

To do this we will:

- Develop a clear architectural vision for all council technology systems, working towards a small number of specialist systems supported by shared components that provide common functions once, integrated through APIs (Application Programming Interface), using cloud and Software as a Service solutions wherever possible
- Fully map our systems, technologies, and assets, allowing us to prioritise improvements and meet common needs more easily
- Fully account for the [14 Cloud Security Principles advocated by the National Cyber Security Centre](#) in our designs
- Build a cloud hosting platform so that all services can use a corporate platform and not need to procure their own hosting
- Migrate all our major services to the cloud (and smaller ones if it makes financial sense)



- Build a full picture of the carbon footprint of our technology estate, then embark on a greening programme to reduce that footprint and help make the council more sustainable
- Write new interoperability standards so that we do not have to commission suppliers to help with complex integration
- Build integration points and automation between systems where a lack of interoperability means significantly worse services for residents and can take a lot of time for staff to deal with
- Review and refresh all back-office systems against this blueprint, helping service areas transition to modern, cloud-based technology that is disaggregated away from few, large suppliers to many smaller ones and with specialist services built in-house
- Fully review and refresh all existing technology policies, ensuring the deal between the council, its residents and its staff is clear
- Deliver an ongoing portfolio of improvements to council systems, corporate technology, and removal of sub-optimal or paper-based council processes, prioritised on a clear roadmap
- Use cross-government open platforms like gov.uk Notify to reduce the cost of common needs like text messaging.

3. Improving data quality through standards

So we can better support joined up digital services across the organisation, a minimum set of standards are required to ensure we are storing data consistently. When back-office systems contain good quality data, it makes the process of changing to a better system in the future more straightforward and is also an enabler for end-to-end digital services. We will support services in determining what the minimum standard should be for their business systems and provide guidance on training staff to meet those standards.

Our intended outcomes for this objective are:

- Service areas have all the data they need to protect and improve service for their users
- We have a clear and comprehensive understanding of our residents, businesses, partners, and visitors needs, both qualitatively and quantitatively, so that we can improve outcomes for and with them
- We publish data that others can build on.

To do this we will:



- Work with business areas on a programme of work to establish documented data standard and staff training materials for each line of business application.
- Carry out a full data privacy review of the council, followed by a data cleansing and reduction programme, making sure we are not holding anything we should not be, deduplicating records and making our data extractable.

4. Enabling use of data analytics and business intelligence

Using the data we hold for insight and operational decisions will improve the efficiency of the council. As we introduce new systems across the organisation, we will do so with an eye on future use for data analytics and business intelligence. We will begin by growing our experience in Microsoft PowerBI and integrating our Geographic Information System to enable spatial analysis to be conducted. As we move into 2026, we expect to have the foundations in place to enable business intelligence to be used routinely across the council.

Our intended outcomes for this objective are:

- We can get insights from our data that help us be more efficient and effective
- We have the right infrastructure to share data and insights with partner organisations in the local area and nationally, so that we all get better together

To do this we will:

- Build an analytics function which anyone in the council can draw on as a resource to help them better understand their business and users.
- Engineer our systems data to make it easy to combine and analyse, including multiple deep dives into business systems.
- Work with suppliers to get better access to our own data.
- Build better reporting and insight on a service-by-service basis so people can truly understand their customer base.

5. Growing digital capability

Supporting officers and members in their use of technology will enable more effective remote working and embed digital within the organisation as the main method of accessing council services. In partnership with the Committee Section and Human Resources



department, we will develop a training programme for improving digital skills and hold regular learning events to answer questions and provide bite sized training sessions on key IT competencies.

Our intended outcomes for this objective are:

- We are proud of our in-house information technology and digital team.
- All our people feel confident in their knowledge and skills around the technology they need to do their jobs.
- Our top tier leaders are educated in the impact of digital technology and are ambassadors inside and outside the organisation for technology innovation.
- We can adapt quickly from project to project, using our existing teams to help the council prioritise and meet its needs.
- The council becomes a destination for the digital, technology and data skills market, and can hire, retain and develop the best talent locally and nationally.

To do this we will:

- Create or bring in mandatory learning and development for all staff so that they fully understand how to use council technology, as well as understanding the basics of data privacy, cyber security, software development, service design and agile ways of working.
- Develop digital leadership capability within the council, in line with the Local Digital Declaration, prioritising the corporate leadership team (the top three tiers of council officers) and council members
- Partner with business areas across the council to co-create service transformation plans enabled by technology - and then deliver on them
- Bring service design and product thinking to the council by developing our staff, including increasing awareness of user-centred design and agile software development
- Build career pathways for our digital, technology and data team, ensuring we can retain, develop, and fulfil them
- Work continuously with other councils, government bodies and the civic sector to share learning, work together and improve.

6. Reducing duplicated functionality

Over time, IT systems have evolved and gained new features. Sometimes functionality overlaps with other systems. To reduce the support burden, systems need to be rationalised and duplicate functionality eliminated. A review of systems and functions will be undertaken, and duplication will be driven out to reduce the estate of supported systems.



Our intended outcomes for this objective are:

- Council technology provides demonstrable value for money, with the right tool for the right job and integration points between services which allow them to easily speak to each other.

To do this we will:

- Bring in new service desk software and processes to create a modern support function and a better self-service experience for staff.
- Modernise our mobile device handling and software deployment so staff are properly supported.
- Redesign our internal processes and governance structures, freeing up officer time for high-value tasks and frontline services.

7. Continual improvement of information security

The threat landscape is continually evolving, and the council must take account of this in protecting the security and integrity of its systems. Improving our proactive capabilities by adopting a Security Operations Centre approach to monitor our systems is a key requirement of moving to a cloud-based environment. Achieving compliance with security regulations such as the Public Services Network (PSN) Code of Connection requires a holistic view of our estate, and by implementing new arrangements we will help improve our overall security posture to keep Gravesham safe from a cyber-attack.

Our intended outcomes for this objective are:

- We have a mature approach to security, meaning we can protect our staff and residents from being exploited.
- We maintain a high level of preparedness to react to any cyber-attack.
- We comply with all applicable cyber security certifications for our environment.

To do this we will:

- Take a secure by default approach with new systems and upgrades
- Maintain high levels of user awareness training for cyber risks.
- Develop cyber security maturity and capability within the information technology team aligned with analysis from risk assessments based upon industry leading standards.





Resourcing

As the need arises for specific funding to enable the implementation of the IT Strategy, we will build an individual business case describing the IT investments in greater detail. At the same time, we will identify agreed sources of funding to assess the impact on the Medium-Term Financial Plan and the IT Reserve.

The shift in industry approaches to acquiring IT systems away from on-premises solutions to cloud-based systems results in most software acquisitions using a subscription model, as opposed to acquisition of tangible assets such as hardware and perpetual licences. Consequently, new investments will likely be on a per annum subscription basis along with accompanying implementation and set up costs.

The IT team delivering the strategy is made up of 18 full time equivalent posts. When implementing the IT Strategy, we will assess the departmental staff structure and individual roles and responsibilities to ensure the delivery of our objectives are sustainable.

It is important to note that the IT strategy cannot guarantee that financial or business benefits are derived directly from it. Benefit and return will rely on the ambition of the organisation to use the capabilities provided. These will enable reconfiguration of operating models and re-design of service delivery. It is clear from the experience of others in local government and other industry sectors that, with appropriate investment in up to date and effective IT solutions, significant and far-reaching redesign of services can be achieved. Benefit is achieved through release of resource, enhanced productivity, and an improved customer experience.



Governance

The portfolio holder for Digital and IT is the Leader of the Executive. The monitoring and reporting of our progress against the strategy will be regularly taken through the Corporate Management Team to the Leader of the Executive, Cabinet, and other committees where there is an overlap of interest (such as the Finance and Audit Committee, and the Performance and Administration Committee).

In addition to this, council members will be briefed on the progress of implementing the strategy via annual training sessions.



Assumptions and Risk

The purpose of this strategy is to bring about positive change to the organisations use of Digital services and IT. As with any change programme there are risks associated with delivery. However, there are also risks associated with doing nothing.

Risks

Risks with change:

There will be disruption to the way things are done

The change may not deliver the expected outcome

The change may be costlier than originally anticipated

Risks with no change:

Systems will become outdated and not able to deliver

An outdated and unoptimised system will be more expensive to run

Outdated systems can pose a cyber security risk

Assumptions

A number of assumptions have been made when writing this strategy.

1. Where the market is required to provide a solution, there will be a solution available.
2. With the right training and support, our staff will be able to gain the relevant digital competencies to work effectively
3. Standards used to design and protect services will remain stable
4. The cloud will remain an accessible and safe location for the hosting of digital services and data
5. Legislation will not be a hindrance to delivery



Delivery Plan

Areas for Action	Year of delivery
Conduct review of end user device hardware in use by staff and replace with standardised laptops. Take into account desktop estate and office layout and identify any requirements for accessibility.	1
Introduce Enterprise Architect capability within the Digital and IT team.	1
Fully map out all systems, technologies, and assets to use as a base for identifying improvements and establishing a carbon footprint of the technology estate.	1
Create business case for improvements to cyber security.	1
Implementation of new website platform and content management system.	1
Build career pathways for our digital, technology and data team.	1
Develop digital leadership capability within the council.	1
Modernise our mobile device handling and software deployment so staff are properly supported.	1
Transition to new Geographical Information System.	1
Review of all back-office systems to establish cloud preparedness.	2
Build out capability of the cloud hosting platform to ensure performance is scalable and meets requirements.	2
Work with business areas on a programme of work to establish documented data standards and staff training materials.	2
Carry out a full data privacy review, followed by a data cleansing and reduction programme.	2
Redesign our internal processes and governance structures, freeing up officer time for high-value tasks and frontline services.	2
Bring in new service desk software and processes.	2
Partner with business areas across the council to co-create service transformation plans enabled by technology.	2
Commence migration of major business applications to the cloud.	3
Deliver an ongoing portfolio of improvements to council systems, corporate technology, and removal of sub-optimal or paper-based council processes.	3
Build a business analytics function.	3
Review projects delivered in years 1 and 2 and identify gaps which need addressing.	3
Migrate any residual on premise systems to third party hosting arrangements.	4
Implement follow up work identified during project reviews.	4



Links to other GBC strategies

The council's Digital and IT Strategy is intrinsically linked in several council policies and strategies, putting technology at the heart of all our activities:



Contact details

For further information about the council's IT & Digital Strategy and its actions, please contact the Assistant Director (IT and Transformation) at darren.everden@gravesham.gov.uk