Hart District Council

Digital Strategy
2024-2028

Introduction

Our diverse communities expect a digital experience from Hart that compares with what they receive in other parts of their lives. They need ways of getting things done at a time and in a way that suits them. They need our services to be simple, intuitive, and quick. Running alongside this, we have to deliver against the backdrop of significant financial pressures and increasing demand. This strategy and the plans that support it are designed to achieve the right balance.

Digital already runs through our work. It helps support the efficient and effective running of our business. It enables residents and business to transact with us and us to partner with others. It helps us to innovate and try new things. But we know we can enhance and expand our digital offer.

At the heart of this is the need to build systems that let our residents get what they need from us, using services they have helped design. Our services will change by using improved technology, supported by a culture that makes sure we adopt it and use it well. While keeping costs low, we can ensure we maintain the security, quality, and effectiveness of our services through this digital strategy.

We're aware that not everybody is able to access what they need online. We need to make sure no one is left behind. Accessing digital services requires people to be digitally enabled, and we will work to help tackle digital exclusion in our communities.

This strategy has a framework and a delivery plan, both of which won't sit still. We will develop and learn as we go along to meet future demands.

Tony Clarke
Portfolio Holder for Digital & Communications

Executive summary

"Many people may never need to speak to us as we tackle the day-to-day demands of council services. But for those who do need us, we're friendly, approachable and on our residents' side. We're good at getting on with the job, striving to protect and enhance the district for a future that serves all parts of our community."
Corporate narrative 2024

We're aware of the growing trend in the last few years for residents to access our services through online channels like our website and linked portals. We want to create digital services that put our residents and businesses at the heart of what we do. We want to set new standards for what we can deliver, and this strategy sets out our digital ambitions.

The strategy recognises that we can still improve on our existing technology. We know that new technology such as AI exists that will help us develop our offer in time. But we need our processes and culture to keep pace with digital and embrace this change.

The strategy sets out the framework of how we will deliver this. It examines the themes and principles that we'll keep at the forefront when we re-design our existing services or consider new opportunities. The strategy concludes with our roadmap, setting out what we will achieve over the next four years.

Both the strategy and roadmap won't sit still and reflects the dynamic nature of the world of digital.

Our digital vision
Harness the culture, processes, and technology of the digital age to improve the lives of the people of Hart and how they engage with us, all in a sustainable way.

Based on the definition of digital by Tom Loosemore, author of the Government's first digital strategy. He emphasises the importance of getting culture, process and operations right to make better technology choices.

- ✓ Culture: The culture of the internet is collaborative, creative, and curious. Adopting this culture will help us deliver better digital work
- ✓ Process: Internet services are processes that are efficient with minimal human intervention, and can be used any time, any place
- ✓ Technology: Internet age technology is accessible and designed around the needs of the people that use it, to help them achieve their goals
- ✓ Internet age: The age we live in, where access to the internet is instant, on all the time, for the vast majority of, *but by no means all*, people
- ✓ People of Hart: Residents, businesses, visitors, staff and councillors, all of whom have a reason to be in Hart and may need our help
- ✓ Sustainable way: We must ensure Hart meets the 2035 deadline to be carbon neutral as an organisation. Technology will play an important role

Strategy development
Our 2019 digital strategy set out two objectives:

- ✓ core structural changes
- ✓ implement a range of digital projects

Core structural changes

- upgraded to Windows 10 and moved our office productivity tools into the cloud
- significant shift from the more traditional desktop computing to complete laptop device estate arising from the response to the pandemic
- this is now consolidated into an ongoing device replacement programme
- built secure VPN for staff to access key business applications including our finance system
- Wi-Fi and network upgrades across the council office
- launched MS Teams telephony replacement project

Digital projects

- designed and built corporate website and Impact Hart microsite with refreshed content and overall structure powered by LocalGovDrupal platform
- replaced legacy housing system with an improved, secure platform to provide choice-based lettings and housing register functionality. Built CBL app and integration with Alexa to check vacancies
- launched Here for Hart directory for local activities, groups and services
- launched modern.gov to digitalise Committee Services and move to paperless meetings

- migrated to online marketing tool to provide newsletters to range of internal and external stakeholders
- introduced digital signatures to our housing service enabling a quicker, more efficient offer to our residents and landlords

Local Digital Declaration
In July 2018, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, Government Digital Service and 45 co-signatory organisations published the Local Digital Declaration.

In March 2019, Hart signed up to the Local Digital Declaration. This declaration set out an ambition for local public services, proposing a cultural and technological shift towards five key principles:

1. We will go even further to redesign our services around the needs of the people using them. This means continuing to prioritise citizen and user needs above professional, organisational and technological silos
2. We will fix our plumbing to break our dependence on inflexible and expensive technology that doesn't join up effectively. This means insisting on modular building blocks for the IT we rely on, and open standards to give a common structure to the data we create
3. We will design safe, secure and useful ways of sharing information to build trust among our partners and citizens, to better support the most vulnerable members of our communities, and to target our resources more effectively
4. We will demonstrate digital leadership, creating the conditions for genuine organisational transformation to happen, and challenging all those we work with to embrace this Local Digital Declaration
5. We will embed an open culture that values, incentivises and expects digital ways of working from every member of our workforce. This means working in the open wherever we can, sharing our plans and experience, working collaboratively with other organisations, and reusing good practice.

As part of our work in developing this strategy, we reaffirm our commitment to the declaration as far as we can, based on our size and resources. We will also consider the Local Government Association digitalisation framework to inform our projects.

Where are we now?
Our Corporate Plan describes our most important aims and priority activities. Underpinning the plan is to ensure we provide a sound and resilient Council. We have a range of commitments including:

- provide the best customer service by focusing on resolving questions and problems first time
- solve issues and questions by being knowledgeable and available through an enhanced and accessible website, by phone, in person, and online
- get our communication and engagement right through regular information sharing and consultation

Key facts
The population size of Hart has increased by 9.2% since 2011. This is higher than the overall increase for England (6.6%)

We have over 20 different platforms to help deliver our services. From benefits to waste collection, housing to planning, we rely on cloud-based services from a host of partners to keep data available and secure for staff, councillors and residents alike

Over half of our visitors access the website via mobile device. The most popular areas on the site are the planning portal and our waste calendar look up

Over 50 webforms have enabled over 15,000 requests to different council services since June 2023. This can range from volunteering at an event to freedom of Information request

On average, we receive over 130,000 individual contacts every month across our channels. From face-to-face at our office through to picking up the phone, staff are ready to provide information, process an application or help with any other request for our services.

Discovery and five years' time
Our discovery phase for the creation of this strategy involved a wide range of stakeholder interviews to understand what works and where we could improve.

	Today	Five years' time
Digital experience	• Multiple 3rd parties providing linked portals to key services including Revs & Bens, Housing and Planning • Limited integration with business systems to help improve the efficiency of online forms • No customer experience owner	A consistent, modern experience across all channels including telephony and face-to-face access. Smooth transition between different platforms
Capability and expertise	• Limited resources and uneven digital skills & awareness across the council • Training for end user in new systems and applications is inconsistent • Opportunity to develop skills in agile methodology	Digitally literate workforce who are confident they can meet the future demands of digital strategy
Data and insight	• Siloed data collection captured and stored within applications • Requires manual intervention for analysis of business intelligence • Mixed data quality with no common standards • 3rd party suppliers own our data	Quality and connected data with agreed standards to bring together and analyse different datasets

Ways of working	• Need to strengthen collaboration between IT and Digital • Inconsistent organisational change management approach • Mixed and competing priorities across the council	Collaboration and alignment for all digital activity and decision-making across the whole Council
Governance	• Lack of digital presence around digital-related procurement • Opportunity to improve the coordination of activity to manage change across IT and digital platforms	Established robust governance and framework that aligns with strategic ambitions to support the effective delivery of digital projects

Themes
Themes surfaced during the discovery phase as we explored opportunities and barriers. The three themes provide structure and context throughout the strategy, showing how people and projects are working towards the vision.

1. Quality interactions
There is a balance to achieve with implementing this strategy. As we provide online services that people want to use, we want to free up staff time and resources to support those who are digitally excluded.

By interactions, we mean people:
• accessing information, advice and guidance about our services
• transacting with our services, including making payments, applying for services
• providing feedback on our services, strategies, plans and policies

We want to:
• Design and deliver digital Council services that are convenient, easy to use, and accessible
• Provide the same level of service whether people use online or traditional channels

Our ambition
• **We will put digital at the heart of services**
  Our tools will allow people to find information or complete any transaction entirely online
• **We will create simple to use services that work first time, every time**
  The tools we create will be accessible and reliable, from request to completion
• **We will keep residents and businesses informed**
  Our service will be designed to communicate with people all the way through using clear and concise methods
• **We will create an excellent website**
  It will be the most accessible and complete source of accurate and up to date information
• **We will put the resident first**

All our digital services will be designed around the person, focussing on simple and convenient delivery, across all channels

2. Responsive council
We will increase the pace at which we are able to deliver digital change, using agile methodology when appropriate, enabling Hart and the communities we serve to reap the benefits of greater convenience and efficiency.

We will improve the skills and confidence of our people with technology and change, helping them to make the most of opportunities for development and thrive within the context of a changing organisation.

We want to:
- Have a confident and empowered workforce, with the skills and tools to meet future challenges
- Staff are kept informed of the future digital horizon and can play a part in helping to shape service delivery

Our ambition
- **We will use our key stakeholders to inform our design of digital services**
  As we build our services, we will consult with residents and staff to understand their expectations and needs
- **We will empower our people to enable digital transformation**
  We will ensure our staff, councillors and senior leaders have the skills, knowledge and confidence to enable digital change
- **We will open our data for reuse**
  We will open up our datasets wherever possible for innovative use internally across our services where appropriate
- **We will realise the value of our geographical data**
  We will review our technology to ensure we analyse and maximise the opportunities that comes with our geographical data
- **We will keep an eye on our carbon-neutral targets**
  We will support Hart's climate change initiatives and consider this in every aspect of service design

3. Collaborative partnerships
Hart's operating model is based on working with partners to offer great services. Many of our residents interact daily with our partners. This means for us to be successful in the delivery of this strategy, we must work with those partners to ensure that their digital offerings contribute to us meeting our vision.

We will consult with our partners on the strategy and regularly meet with them to discuss how they can support us in its implementation. When contracts are being renewed, we will ensure that the vision, outcomes, and themes of the digital strategy are factored into our appraisals of submissions.

We want to:

- Identify council wide areas for improvement and align processes and approach to remove duplication, shared learning and work at pace
- Provide recognised, consistent and effective digital access into all of our services

Our ambition

- **We will collaborate closely with our partners throughout the relationship lifecycle**
  From procurement to performance management, we will set our digital priorities throughout our working relationship with our partners to embed our themes and principles
- **We will use new technologies to improve our delivery**
  We will work closely with our partners to assess where we can use innovative technology such as artificial intelligence and automation to improve our services
- **We will consider risk, resilience and security on all that we do**
  Our services will be designed to minimise risk for both the resident and Hart, with security designed in from the start
- **We will work to reduce digital exclusion**
  We will work with our partners to reduce digital exclusion, improve online access and encourage lifetime digital skills development

Principles

Our digital journey as a council is about people, not just technology. We will focus on the person, be that a resident, a business owner, a visitor, a councillor, or a member of staff. For us to change relies on us **all** taking ownership and responsibility for engaging in the digital change

Our eight principles will guide what work is undertaken to implement the strategy. They will set out how work will be approached, to ensure everything we do contributes towards our vision.

Meeting needs

We will prioritise projects that meet the needs of the people of Hart, and our approach to projects will always be customer-centric. We will do this by adopting user-centered design approaches and techniques, including empathy mapping, journey mapping, and user research.

Reducing costs

Efficiency is key to making the most of the opportunity of digital. This means making our service truly efficient. This will range from our web-based forms integrated with back-office systems to reduce duplication to providing notifications, so residents don't need to contact us to chase things up.

Data and insight

To make the most of our data, we need to develop a data-informed culture and bring data together out of the service silos where it is stored. We need to visualise it in new and useful ways. We must keep data and information safe.

Managing change

We will provide guidance and training to manage change and ensure people are confident with new technology and ways of working. We need to adopt agile ways and break big problems down into smaller ones, and fix them bit by bit, rather than trying to do everything in one go.
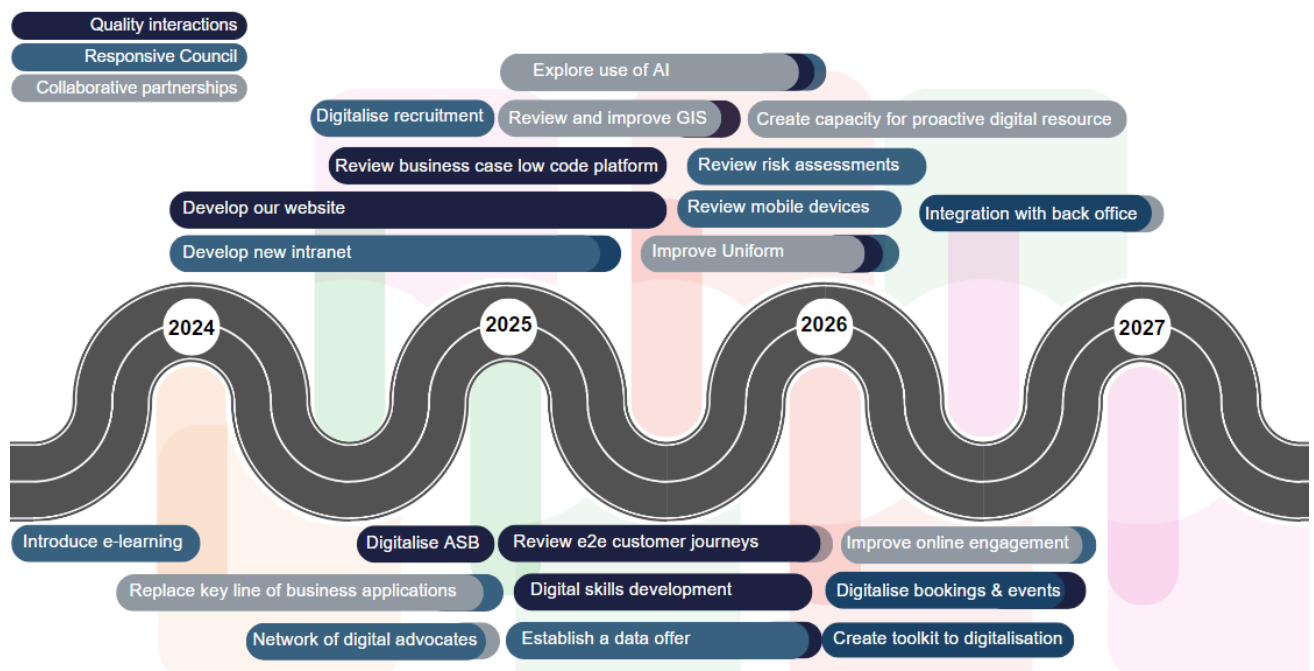
Safe and secure

Cyber-security is an essential activity for us to ensure that services are protected from malicious attack. We must ensure that all digital initiatives take security into account. We will continue to ensure our staff are fully aware of the risks and the organisation is always protected.

Sustainable by design

We must be vigilant about the climate impact of the technology we use. There is much excitement about the potential around AI, but there's an equal amount of concern about the amount of power needed to make this a reality.
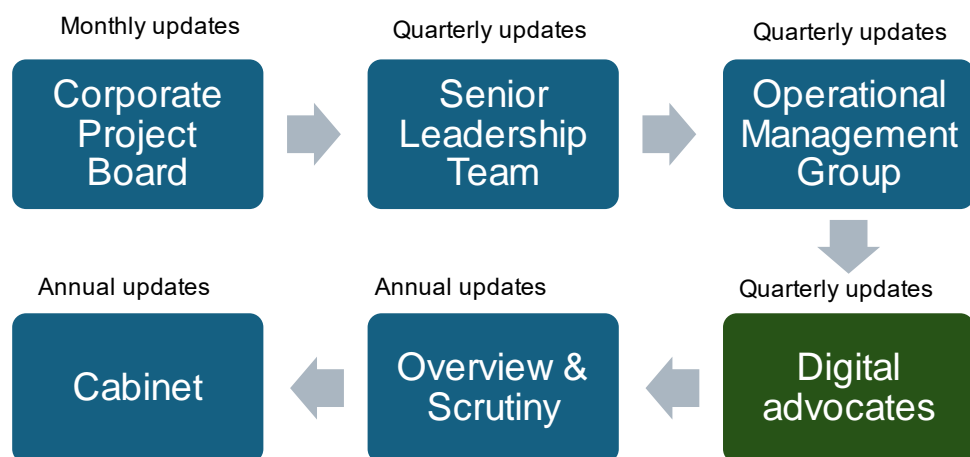
Action plan

This is a high level of the roadmap. We expect to review the plan annually to reflect changes as we move beyond the next 2-3 years. We will build a costed delivery plan for each element and seek approval throughout the course of the programme.

Quality interactions
Responsive Council
Collaborative partnerships

Explore use of AI
Digitalise recruitment | Review and improve GIS | Create capacity for proactive digital resource
Review business case low code platform | Review risk assessments
Develop our website | Review mobile devices | Integration with back office
Develop new intranet | Improve Uniform

2024 — 2025 — 2026 — 2027

Introduce e-learning | Digitalise ASB | Review e2e customer journeys | Improve online engagement
Replace key line of business applications | Digital skills development | Digitalise bookings & events
Network of digital advocates | Establish a data offer | Create toolkit to digitalisation

Reporting and measuring

We will report progress through this governance structure

Monthly updates → **Corporate Project Board**

Quarterly updates → **Senior Leadership Team**

Quarterly updates → **Operational Management Group**

Quarterly updates → **Digital advocates**

Annual updates → **Overview & Scrutiny**

Annual updates → **Cabinet**

The Digital Advocates group is planned for 2025. This group of volunteer staff will act as resident advocates across directorates for all key resident touchpoints.

The goals, outcomes and actions in this strategy will be captured in a detailed action plan, including timescales, resources and measures of success. This will include:

Feedback from residents
- Resident surveys
- Focus groups
- Testing groups
- Feedback from compliments, complaints and enquiries

Feedback from staff
- Reponses to compliments and complaints
- Annual staff surveys

Platform analytics
- Contact volumes and channels
- Analysis of themes and trends
- Service measures incl. key performance indicators
- Mystery shopping
- Analysis of compliments and complaints