ICT AND DIGITAL STRATEGY

2024-2027

wrexham
COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL
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FOREWORD

Working with the council's ICT and digital teams to ensure efficiency and resilience is an important part of my role as lead member. I am, therefore, pleased that this document builds on the successes of the ICT and Digital Strategy 2020-23.

This strategy has been put together following feedback from customers, staff, partner organisations, Audit Wales and the Welsh Local Government Association. It puts users at the heart of everything we do and focusses on ensuring a streamlined experience which is, therefore, more time efficient for users.

Efficiency through digital technology is also a key part in addressing the current challenges faced by Wrexham Council such as the increased demand for services, financial constraints and a lack of resources.

While around 80% of customers use our self-service digital platform, we know that increasing our digital focus leaves some of you worried about being able to access services online, which is why digital inclusion is also an essential element within this strategy.

This is an important strategy that impacts all residents and I would like to thank all those involved in putting it together.

**CLLR BEVERLEY PARRY-JONES
LEAD MEMBER FOR
CORPORATE SERVICES**

INTRODUCTION BY THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Wrexham is recognised across local government for its use of digital marketing techniques including blogging, customer-focussed content, use of analytics and a 'conversion-focussed' approach to communication with customers.

It is this commitment to ensuring that information is readily available to residents in new and efficient ways that has made us stand out. We have also made sure that all information is in open and accessible formats in order to remove any accessibility barriers for people with disabilities, as well as ensuring that residents are able to access all information in Welsh or English.

All of this is excellent and positive progress, but this strategy also serves to drive further improvement. As such we have five areas that form key themes within this refreshed strategy:

- Digital inclusion and skill
- Cyber security
- Data analytics
- Artificial intelligence
- Developing a smart city

One area that we have already been focussing on is developing a smart city, which will have a positive impact on all areas of the local authority. It will enable us to build a real-time picture of our city including footfall, air quality, parking and traffic, which will help us make informed decisions moving forward when it comes to managing the city centre, and attracting and hosting major sporting and cultural events.

IAN BANCROFT
CHIEF EXECUTIVE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The digital landscape is rapidly evolving, transforming the way we live, work, and interact with our surroundings. As a Welsh local authority, we recognise the importance of embracing digital technologies to enhance the lives of our residents, improve service delivery, and foster economic growth.

Building on the success of our initial ICT and Digital Strategy 2020-23 this refreshed strategy outlines our vision and strategic objectives for harnessing the power of technology over the next three years, 2024-27. It identifies five key themes that we will develop over this period:

- Digital Inclusion and skills

- Cyber Security

- Data Analytics

- Artificial Intelligence

- Developing a smart city

The ICT and Digital Strategy will underpin all areas of the new Council Plan 2023-28 as we continue to 'develop a digital council that enables us to modernise the way we work and engage with our customers'. This document will detail the high level strategic direction and plans for the full range of Information Communication Technology (ICT) and Digital Service delivery for 2024-2027.

The change in working practices driven by the pandemic, has created an environment that has agile working at its core. This has been reflected in the work undertaken to modernise office buildings to create a modern and vibrant space supported by the technology to enable this. Changing customer behaviour and the expectation to access council services at a time that suits the individual has also led to a huge take-up of online services over the last three years.

Our refreshed vision for the future of digital has been informed by a number of external reviews including a WLGA digital self-assessment, Audit Wales digital review and customer insight data collected in a range of ways.

The objectives set out in this strategy aim to further develop the way in which we work and the tools available to continue to build on progress made to date and to drive forward Wrexham County Borough Council as a truly Digital First authority. At a regional level this strategy plays a pivotal role in shaping projects that support the Welsh Government and WLGA to realise their ambitions for a national digital service across Wales.

Improved digital connectivity has been identified as the most important factor in the ongoing economic and social transformation of North Wales. The North Wales Economic Ambition Board (NWEAB) has a project to aid the development of digital connectivity to match this transformation to 2030 and beyond. The strategy developed by NWEAB supports the Growth Vision for the Economy of North Wales, with development funded through the North Wales Growth Bid and other sources of funding.

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DRIVERS FOR CHANGE

The financial pressures now facing many Welsh Local Authorities provide a challenging environment from which efficiencies are sought across all departments. This strategy aims to support departments to streamline processes and provide the technical solutions to enable them to achieve these efficiencies. The pandemic and cost of living crisis has also created a lasting impact on those people who need our services, demand for support is increasing across areas such as Housing, Social Care and Finance.

Customer expectations are changing all the time and residents now expect a similar experience from councils as they do from their bank or online retailers. Our next generation of customer will expect to contact us online and is unlikely to consider telephoning or calling into a council reception. A timely response, access 24 hours a day 7 days a week and regular progress updates have become are expected. Around 80% of customers now use our self-service digital platform to access council services, this enables us to free up other resources to help support those people who are unable to go online.

Technology is rapidly changing and as Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Data Analytics begin to become mainstream tools it is important that we are able to adopt these technologies in line with the authority's ethical processes to benefit customers, Elected Members and officers alike.

In order to support our council's plans to decarbonise we need to embrace opportunities to work in an agile way, removing our traditional paper-based processes and developing a Smart City that uses technology that enables us to be more efficient.

WHERE ARE WE NOW?

MyWrexham MyAccount
Save time. Do it online.

Customers who have signed up to MyAccount:

End 19/20 – 49,507

End 22/23 – 72,277

Percentage of enquiries made via self-service rather than by telephone:

End 19/20 – 66%

End 22/23 – 73%

Delivering this strategy requires a holistic approach to everything we do ensuring the availability of the digital option for customers whether directly or by making this option available in our communities. This will require a workforce with the skills to do their jobs in a digital world and leaders who understand digital, its potential and benefits both for users and the authority as a whole. Digital redesign projects bring about meaningful business transformation across all departments that enable officers to work more efficiently, with modern technology to communicate and deliver services.

The development of the corporate digital customer platform and functionality of the MyAccount provision continues. There are now over 170 processes available to customers online covering a wide range of service requests. Customer feedback for the year 2023/24 tells us that 95% of customers accessing services online feel the process is easy.

With the increased development of digital ways of working it is essential to identify those members of the community who experience difficulties accessing online services. A lack of basic digital skills or digital poverty, not being able to afford kit or data costs, have been recognised as a national concern.

With this in mind, it is key to the success of the ICT and Digital Strategy 2024-2027 that the Council takes a collaborative approach to this problem, working with partners to identify initiatives that can support digital access for all. The skills developed will not only help those

people needing to use council services but will help them to access many other vital organisations.

ICT provides the infrastructure for these business change programmes to develop. It continues to strengthen its cyber security posture and modernise practices and processes in line with industry standards ensuring applications and data reside on supported and secure systems.

Monitoring the horizon of the ICT and Digital industry's trajectory is crucial for maintaining a comprehensive understanding of technical trends and advancements. This proactive approach enables us to leverage emerging technologies and cultivate them to discover novel and innovative methods of delivering services aligned with our strategic direction.

Smarter Cities initiatives have also recently been implemented with footfall and air quality monitors in use throughout the city centre and these will be developed further over the course of this Strategy.

VISION

Our digital ambition is to re-imagine service delivery that will meet the future needs and challenges or our communities and support the Council to work efficiently and in innovative ways.

HOW IT ALL FITS TOGETHER

PROVIDE:

Services that customers opt for digital by choice. Empowering staff, customers and the wider community to embrace new technologies to support them to work and live in Wrexham

CULTURE:

Digital first, a workforce that has skills and technology to embrace changing needs, structures that encourage innovation and collaboration, co-design

RESILIENT:

Develop a robust infrastructure that can meet any future challenges or opportunities. Everything from new technology, reduced budgets or a worldwide pandemic

SIMPLIFY:

Our internal processes to drive efficiency at every opportunity

DELIVER:

A modern, fit for future service for our customers and communities – developing innovative digital services that are user-centric and improve the customer journey

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the ICT and Digital Strategy 2024-27 will underpin all areas of the Council Plan 2023-28 and specifically focus on two of the main priorities:

- Ensuring a Fair and Safe Place

- Supporting a Highly Skilled and Engaged Workforce, Focused on Delivering Services

CUSTOMERS AND COMMUNITY: A DIGITAL COUNTY BOROUGH

Economy and Planning teams will drive forward the Digital 'Smart' City initiative which will see Wrexham embrace the Smart Cities approach to a digitally enabled, better connected city centre with a data driven approach to management and business support. Long-term investment in digital infrastructure is required, not only will it help build the reputation of a modern city, but recent studies identified the need for further technology, sharing data and analytics, and digital infrastructure that facilitates large cultural events and activities in support of the Wrexham 2029 City of Culture ambitions.

The Council have invested in building a comprehensive smart footfall network and 'Internet of Things' network in the city centre. This network is enabling Wrexham to adopt a data-driven approach to managing the centre and attracting and hosting major cultural and sporting events. Alongside a range of other benefits linked to business performance, decarbonisation and transport. The Council have already installed access points that form a smart footfall network with additional units due to be installed this year.

INTERNET OF THINGS

Internet of Things (I.O.T) is a platform where data is sent over the network by means of radio waves, similar to an analogue TV signal. The sensor usually stores the data and then sends over to the gateway receiver at timed intervals ie. every 15 mins. As this method usually requires small amounts of power, the sensor's battery expectancy is around 10 years, which means this can be very cost effective. Many UK councils are now investing in this technology as it is deemed to be very low risk and the outcomes can be substantial.

We currently have in the pilot:-

OUTDOOR AIR QUALITY SENSORS

When installed these sensors help to measure temperature and CO_2 levels

INDOOR FOOTFALL SENSORS

Measuring customer footfall can help a business owner plan activity such as scheduling requirements based on past data and identifying how different events impact trade. With the local authority supporting this scheme, we can see what really works for Wrexham in terms of what types of events are held.

TRAFFIC SENSORS

It is possible to count the number of vehicles coming into the city centre using traffic sensors.

This data can be used to promote active travel, helping to manage road maintenance and even planning applications.

SOIL MOISTURE SENSORS

To help promote the green infrastructure within the city centre it is possible to install soil moisture sensors, these support growth by identifying when plants need water. This also saves time and water by actually monitoring the levels beforehand.

CAR PARKING SENSORS

20 sensors have been placed in 4 local authority car parks to understand the dwell time and number of vehicles parking in spaces. These can be linked to a parking app to highlight to visitors how many spaces there are in each car park, which would be helpful to support the visitor experience.

The scope for a Smart City is endless and can have a positive impact on all areas of the local authority, making efficiencies as well as understanding the behaviour of our city.

This gives us informed decision making in the future. This data should be used in accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018 to demonstrate the impact of interventions, investments, and regeneration schemes. For example, the impact on footfall of an individual event or marketing campaign, investments such as the Football Museum for Wales, or road closures on the busyness of different areas of the centre. The Council's Smart City Officer will lead the 'what does the data say' approach to the distribution of data to ensure stakeholders and organisations have the analytics to help design and plan city centre initiatives.

COLLABORATION ACROSS OUR COMMUNITIES

Developing community capacity and enabling groups to be self-sustaining can also be supported by digital. Helping groups to raise income through digital platforms and giving them the skills to deliver social media campaigns to promote initiatives will reduce reliance on public funding and enable communities to take the lead on improving and shaping the places in which they live.

Through regular consultation and engagement with our customers we will ensure that they recognize the benefits of accessing our services digitally. Involving customers in user-centred design and testing of our digital platforms will also confirm that they meet the needs of those people who use them.
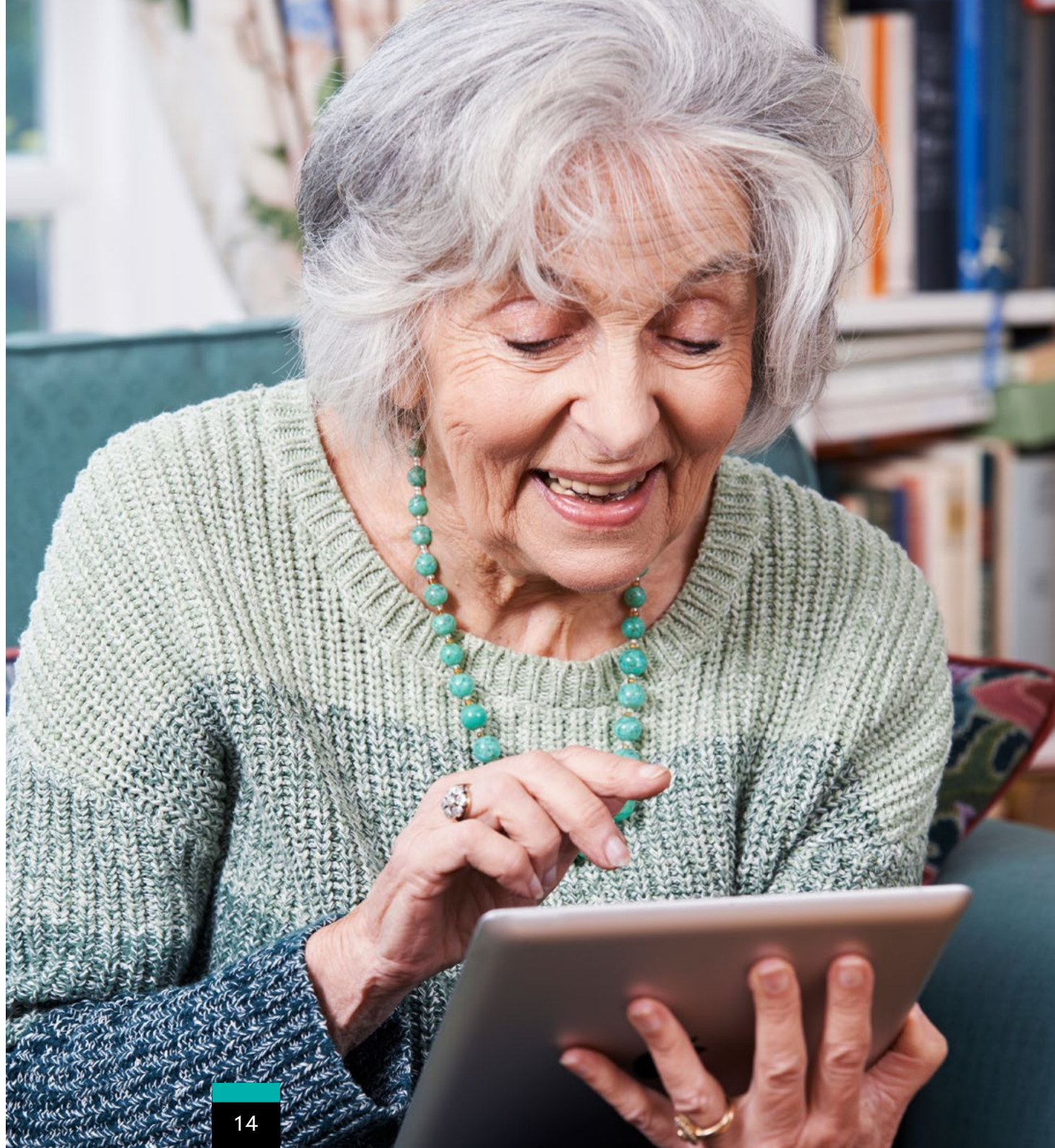
DIGITAL INCLUSION

Digitally excluded people include those who have limited or no access to equipment and connectivity, lack the skills, motivation and confidence to go online and also the affordability to do so.

The pandemic turbo charged the vital role and need for digital technology and society had to quickly adapt to this change. Online shopping, paying bills, remote learning, working from home and socialising digitally over the internet all became a way of life. People quickly adapted to these changes but the pandemic also highlighted how the digital divide is a serious issue in the UK.

We need to build and increase on what has been achieved already so that moving forward we aim for everybody to have affordable digital access and the skills to benefit them from what digital offers.

A variety of initiatives are taking place within Contact Wrexham, the Wellbeing Hub, in Estate Offices and within Social Care to support those people who want to go online but may not have the necessary skills to do so. This work is proving to be welcomed by our customers.

Over the last three years our partnership with Digital Communities Wales (DCW) has developed further. A range of training has been delivered across a number of service areas. This has supported officers to gain the skills needed

to help others get online. The Council has also partnered with the Good Things Foundation who operate a databank that allows customers to access free data. This initiative is provided in both the Wellbeing Hub and in Contact Wrexham.

The Council has also signed the Digital Inclusion Charter for Wales and is a member of Digital Inclusion Alliance Wales. This helps to strengthen the initiatives we deliver and firmly puts digital inclusion at the heart of everything we do.

DESIGNING DIGITAL SERVICES

The way in which we design our ways of working should meet the needs of individuals, businesses and our partner organisations. Removing expensive ways to pay, having 24/7 access with updates on progress when reporting or applying for services and one view of the customer via the digital platform will allow for a streamlined, easily accessible customer journey that is also more efficient for the Council.

Rather than digital services by default it would be better that our digital processes are so user-friendly they become the option of choice. Merely reducing traditional channels and replacing them with ineffective digital ones creates failure demand, or unnecessary contact when a customer has to make contact to clarify or chase something, and isolated customers who find it hard to get the services they need. Therefore, our approach to building new ways of working should incorporate end to end process redesign with the user experience at centre. By creating streamlined, cost-effective digital processes that are easy to use and remove waste from the process will reduce demand on our limited resources.

All online council services and official information should have a consistent user experience, share a single design system and interaction patterns. We have one corporate customer platform that creates an interface with all council services. We will regularly involve customers in focus groups and user testing to ensure any new developments meet their needs and that the technology is fit for purpose.

The council's website has been nationally recognized for its high accessibility rating. Digital services are built with re-use in mind, so that our information and services can easily be found through search engines and are accessible using third party devices such as voice assistants and assistive technology.

All online content will be in the user's language of choice, Welsh or English, throughout the end to end process.

All council information is in open and accessible formats by default, this removes any barriers to access for people with disabilities.

HOW WE WORK – A DIGITAL COUNCIL
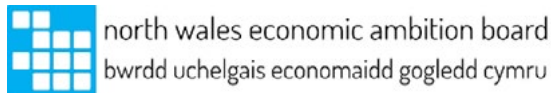
We require a workforce equipped with the necessary digital skills for their roles in the contemporary world. It is imperative to have leaders who possess a profound understanding of digital technology, recognizing the potential and advantages for both users and the overall authority.

We will continue to develop an agile workforce that uses cloud technology to access the information they require to deliver services wherever they may be working. To advance our digital leadership, elected Members and senior management will play a pivotal role as digital champions throughout the authority. The collaboration between the Digital team, ICT, and Human Resources will be instrumental in devising a variety of initiatives aimed at fostering digital skills development at all organizational levels. These efforts will be integrated into the Organisational Development Strategy.

Every Manager has a responsibility to create the right environment to ensure that our modern approach to work and ways of working for people management are embedded in how they organise their team, embrace the digital and self-service culture, create flexible working environments, communicate and manage effectively being fully responsibility for the people management aspect of their roles.

Our existing close partnerships with the private and public sectors position us to leverage cutting-edge technical expertise and facilitate the exchange of knowledge among Welsh local authorities.

CHANGING TOGETHER

The most successful digital redesign projects come from the service itself. This is when the business takes an objective view of their current processes and work with the specialists in the Digital team to develop digital solutions that are fit for purpose. Everyone should own digital and be given the opportunity to become part of future solutions.

Critical to success is the need to digitally empower the workforce. Through involvement in the redesign of processes, use of mobile technology and immediate access to systems wherever they are, with the ability to update and progress work from the field, an agile workforce will be developed.

Projects that underpinned our earlier ICT and Digital Strategy 2020-23 have successfully changed the way many departments work, we now need to build on this achievement to radically redesign services that are efficient and streamlined so that they are able to meet our current and future challenges.
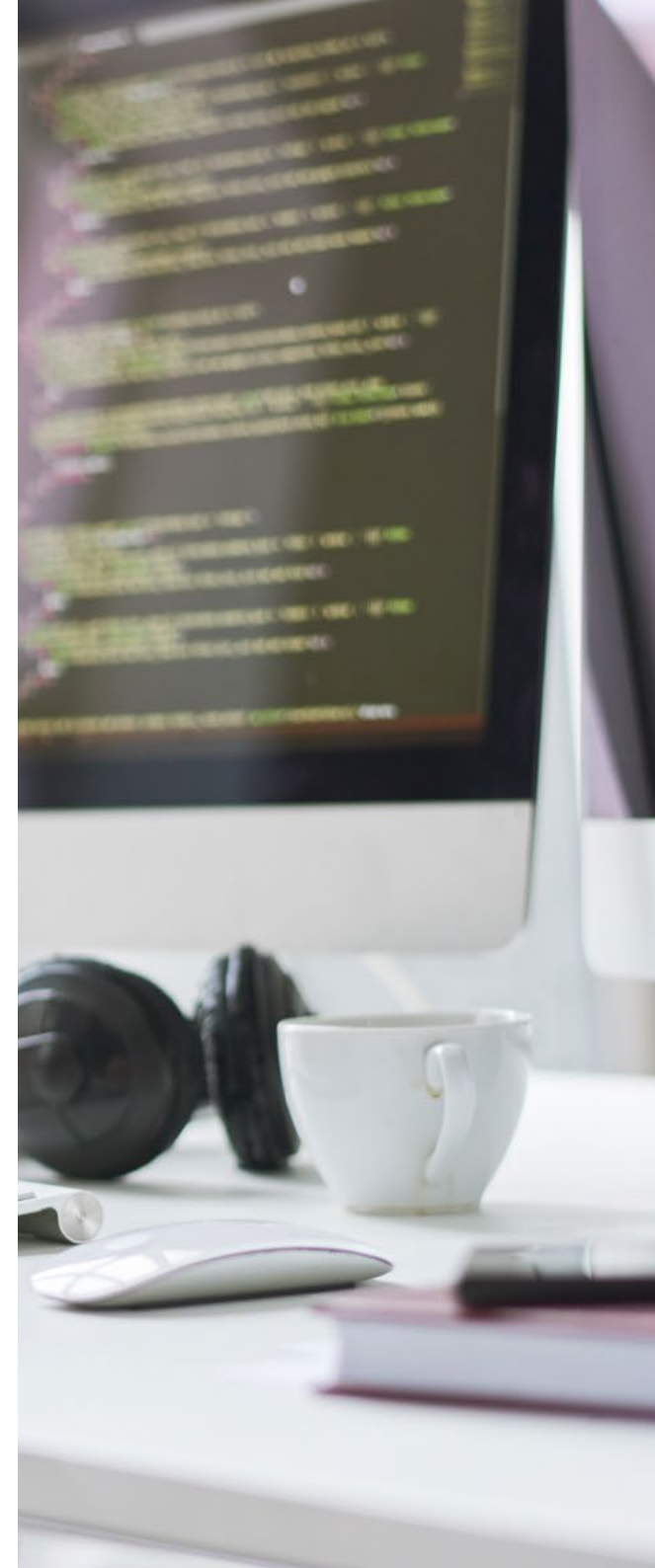
DIGITAL COMMUNICATIONS

Social media and e-marketing tools are proving to be a cost-efficient way to communicate with our customers and communities.

Wrexham is recognised across local government for its use of digital marketing techniques and in particular blogging, customer-focused content, use of analytics and a 'conversion-focused' approach to communicating with customers.

Internal communications tools are also needed to support these new ways of working. Digital platforms such as Microsoft Teams, SharePoint, access to blogs, video and live chat encourage conversation across an agile workforce. Without this there is a risk that officers become isolated and outputs are reduced. Digital communication makes it easier for people to work together without barriers and allows for innovation, experimentation and collaboration.

DIGITAL ANALYTICS

Our council services maintain a vast amount of data across numerous systems. The effectiveness of leveraging this data for decision-making hinges on the presence of integrated systems and sufficient business intelligence reporting tools. It is crucial that the data is in universally accessible and usable formats to minimise the need for manipulation before utilization.

The collection and analysis of pertinent data play a pivotal role in driving performance and shaping the design and delivery of services. Employing predictive analytics based on past customer interactions allows for the provision of tailored services, fostering a sense of value and awareness among customers regarding matters important to them. Used ethically, data can enable proactive service delivery, steering away from a reactive approach. Early intervention becomes possible, averting costly mistakes, preventing issues, and enhancing the health and well-being of our communities. Collaborative data sharing with partners, particularly in Health and Social Care services, contributes to improved outcomes.

To achieve continuous improvement and prioritize process redesign, it is essential to align with demand. The data at our disposal serves as evidence, allowing us to focus on areas that yield the most significant business impact. Through the digitization of services, real transformation in service delivery can be achieved.
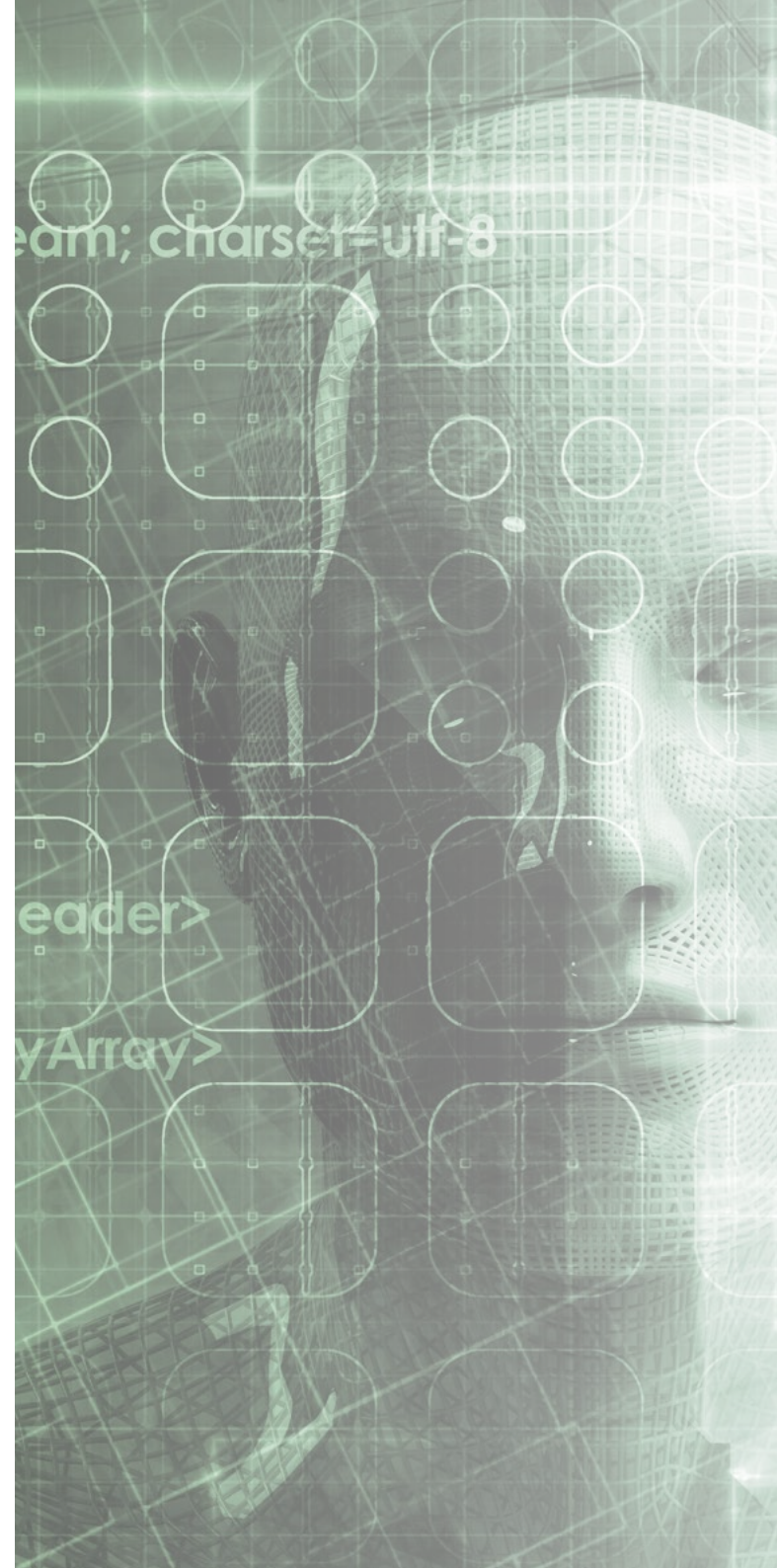
ICT FRAMEWORK

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) serves as the catalyst for business transformation, and a robust infrastructure is instrumental in instilling confidence in digital services. This, in turn, fosters trust among our customers, staff, and elected members in the advantages of the digital age.

Sustained investment in ICT and Digital Services is imperative to propel this transformation and provide services with the necessary tools to modernise their sectors. It is crucial to view the investment in ICT and Digital as interconnected components rather than isolated initiatives, as the latter can lead to unnecessary expenses. Embracing a holistic approach to change ensures that we always keep the broader perspective in focus.

Artificial Intelligence in the workplace is also becoming a mainstream technology and as we prepare for its introduction it is important that we have strict governance and security over the data transitioned into this environment.

Immediate projects that support this include:

- Next stages in the deployment of Microsoft 365 to include Collaboration, OneDrive and SharePoint

- Evaluating the business benefits of AI tools like Microsoft Copilot

- Continuously improving our Cyber Security Posture in line with industry best practice.

The migration of our File Shares to Microsoft 365 offers a host of advantages. This transition empowers us to establish robust governance measures in compliance with GDPR and data protection regulations, while also allowing the contents of files held to be searchable. The upgraded security features not only further protect our data but also encourage heightened collaboration, allowing multiple individuals to edit the same document simultaneously, including from mobile devices if required. Furthermore, it streamlines the sharing of documents with partner organisations like the NHS or Police. By embracing this initiative, Wrexham positions itself for the forthcoming integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI), a possibility currently unattainable with our existing on-premise file shares. This ensures our preparedness to fully leverage the evolving landscape of AI as it becomes mainstream.

MEASURING SUCCESS

How we will monitor the success of this strategy user a range of quantative and qualitative customer insight information including:

- User satisfaction data

- Website feedback

- Engagement with MyAccount and govDelivery

- Digital Inclusion support statistics

- Comprehensive range of customer access feedback

- Performance Indicators in Council Plan 2023-28

PRIORITY: ENSURING WREXHAM IS FAIR AND SAFE

CPFs3 - Percentage of customers accessing online services, who feel it is easy to access council services on our website.

CPFs4 - Percentage of service requests through self-service rather than mediated telephony.