

<b>Report title</b>	<b>Digital Transformation Strategy</b>
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<b>Department</b>	Digital Services
<b>Exempt?</b>	No

**Purpose of report:**

- **To resolve**

**Synopsis of report:**  
**This report sets out the vision for the next Digital Transformation Strategy for the following three years to ensure the Council meets its objectives for the future. This, in turn, translates to a more efficient and effective organisation, ultimately fulfilling the Council's core mission of serving its residents.**

**Recommendation(s):**  
**Members to approve the Digital Transformation Strategy and associated action plan.**

## 1. Context and background of report

- 1.1 With the majority of improvements outlined in the previous Digital Services Strategy 2017-2020 having been delivered and with the new Corporate Plan, Corporate Themes and Service Action Plans in place, it is now time to consider how Runnymede will continue to meet customer expectations, giving greater choice, accessible, convenient and more responsive services at a cost the Council can afford.
- 1.2 The next chapter of our digital transformation journey builds upon the significant improvements delivered through the previous strategy including:
- Upgrading Revenues, Benefits, Housing, Planning, Land Charges and Document Management Systems
  - Session Initiation Protocol (SIP) trunks, Voice Over Internet Protocol (VO/IP) and telephony upgrades
  - Hardware refresh including Windows 10, Virtual Desktop Infrastructure (VDI) upgrades
  - Windows 2012 server upgrades
  - O365 and MS Teams implementation
  - Migration from Citrix to Virtual Private Network (VPN)
  - Agile working and Hybrid meeting rooms
  - Modern.Gov implementation
  - Member device refresh (move to Surface Pro devices)
  - New service desk (Zendesk) implementation
  - Information Technology Infrastructure Library (ITIL 4) Accreditation for all Digital Services staff
  - Network and Infrastructure refresh

- HR & Payroll system
- Combined CRM & Website
- Security improvements, SIEM, Egress

- 1.3 We must acknowledge the complexities of the current landscape. Like all local authorities, Runnymede Borough Council faces increasing pressure on service delivery, driven by rising costs, demographic shifts, and changing customer expectations. The recent issuance of a non-statutory Best Value Notice by the Government further underscores the need for continuous improvement and efficiency gains. Additionally, customers are increasingly demanding accessible, user-friendly, and digitally enabled services.
- 1.4 This strategy recognises these challenges and embraces the opportunities they present. However, it is crucial to do so while prioritising robust digital security. As we move towards a more digital landscape, safeguarding sensitive resident data and council infrastructure from cyber threats must be paramount.
- 1.5 This strategy recognises these challenges and embraces the opportunities they present. Additionally, customers are increasingly demanding accessible, user-friendly, and digitally-enabled services.
- 1.6 This Digital Transformation Strategy recognises these challenges and embraces the opportunities they present. Building upon this solid foundation, the next iteration of the Council's Digital Transformation strategy will further refine and enhance its digital services, ensuring Runnymede remains a leader in secure digital innovation.

## **2. Report and, where applicable, options considered and recommended**

- 2.1 The aim of the Digital Transformation strategy is to underpin the Council's Customer First Strategy and become a future-ready Council leading in digital innovation and transformation. We will achieve this by maximizing the investments made in previous technology ensuring that we are using every system to capacity before seeking new investments. Through this approach, we will deliver efficient data-driven and customer-focused services, empowering staff and fostering a culture of continuous improvement.
- 2.2 This Digital Transformation strategy is firmly anchored in the overarching goals outlined in our Corporate Business Plan and Organisational Development Strategy. This alignment ensures that our digital improvements work in harmony with the Council's vision and strategic threads, guaranteeing a cohesive and impactful approach to local service delivery. It enables the entire Council to promote a 'Customer First' culture in which customers are valued and receive high-quality Services:
- **Building a secure and resilient foundation**
    - Continue to collaborate with the National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) for guidance and threat intelligence
    - Continue to scan for vulnerabilities and patch accordingly mitigating new online threats.
    - Establish a Cyber Security Incident response team (CSIRT) with clear procedures that links into the Council's business continuity plans and Incident Management Team
    - The Council's backup infrastructure will be migrated to a secure, government-backed data centre

- Continually review operating systems and security patches of all servers to ensure they remain compliant with Microsoft's support agreements.
  - Upgrade our storage area network (SAN) hardware and software to the latest version
  - Transition to a cloud-based Security Information Event Management (SIEM) solution. This will further strengthen our ability to identify potential security threats
  - Remove end of life PDTN lines and implement VO/IP at remote sites
  - Work with Safer Runnymede to review their IT infrastructure
  - Upgrade to higher capacity redundant WAN links to accommodate increased usage
  - Implement Biometric security technology
- **Delivering great customer and digital experiences**
    - Evidence based review of top 50 on-line services
    - Review of customer access channels to increase channel shift
    - Explore technology for recruiting to and managing the Citizen's panel
    - Implement Microsoft copilot to create a chatbot for the website
    - Expand booking functionality to community halls, day centres and pitch bookings
    - Improve customer experience by analysing heat maps making on-line services easier and more accessible for customers
    - Explore how augmented reality can be used to create our own virtual tours
    - Member device refresh (move to laptops)
- **Maximise existing technology**
    - Analyse software licences and hardware infrastructure to identify potential improvements for core services
    - Review all IT contracts and spend to re-confirm our baseline position and identify opportunities for savings and efficiencies
    - Ensure future IT investments align with strategic goals by creating a Digital Transformation Steering group
    - Explore opportunities to partner with neighbouring authorities for income and cost reduction projects
    - Expand OneAccount to other service areas
    - Expand on-line booking system to include appointments for services areas
- **Embracing smarter systems**
    - Organise a programme of digital drop-in sessions that will include a mix of training and knowledge sharing on technology and approaches available at the Council.
    - Explore how artificial intelligence (AI) can be used across the Council to create capacity within service areas
    - Roll out training, corporate standards and Microsoft Forms across the Council for internal business processes and user engagement
    - Implement a new Financial Management system
    - Upgrade the Council's Property Gazetteer system

2.3 This Digital Transformation Strategy will be delivered through a dedicated Digital Transformation Programme, ensuring focused execution and measurable progress.

Each theme will have its own workstream, led by dedicated teams and governed by a clear programme delivery plan.

- 2.4 To ensure effective governance, a new Digital Transformation Review Group will be established. This will be an internal officer steering and delivery group, comprising key stakeholders across departments, who will oversee programme delivery, track progress against goals, and make necessary adjustments as needed.
- 2.5 In addition to the programme delivery, we will align the delivery of the strategy with corporate governance and reporting mechanisms.

### **3. Policy framework implications**

- 3.1 The strategy supports the following corporate values as identified in the Corporate Business Plan 2022-2026:
  - Customer-focused
  - Performance driven
  - Innovative
  - Delivering excellent value for money
  - Promoting equality and diversity

### **4 Resource implications/Value for Money**

- 4.1 Expenditure outlined within the Digital Transformation Strategy for year one activities have already been included in the Customer, Digital and Collection Services Action Plan for 24/25 and in the Medium-Term Financial Strategy and Capital programmes.
- 4.2 Activities identified for years two and three will be subject to robust business cases and approval sought through the Council's democratic committee process.

### **5. Legal implications**

- 5.1 The strategy will comply with the General Data Protection Regulations and Equalities Act. Any procurement requirements arising from the strategy will follow the Council's Contract Standing Orders and other legislation.

### **6. Equality implications**

- 6.1 Councillors need to demonstrate that they have consciously thought about the three aims of the Public Sector Equality Duty, as set out in Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, as part of the decision-making process. The three aims the authority must have due regard for are:
  - eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation
  - advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it
  - foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic.
- 6.2 The Council must pay due regard to any obvious risk of such discrimination arising from the decision before them. There is no prescribed manner in how the equality duty must be exercised though producing an EIA is the most usual method. The protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race (including ethnic or national origins, colour or nationality), religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation.

6.3 It is anticipated that this Digital Transformation Strategy will have a positive impact on those with protected characteristics. An full EIA has been completed and approved by the Equalities Board on 30 May 2024.

## 7. Environmental/Sustainability/Biodiversity implications

7.1 Various projects within the strategy will focus on the green agenda including the planned improvements to the Council's car parks, paperless parking permits, paperless committee reports, increasing on-line payments, Direct Debit, e-billing/invoicing, expansion of the 'Report it' functionality and other initiatives.

## 8. Risk Implications

8.1 There are several risks associated with Runnymede not having a current Digital Transformation strategy:

- **Reduced Accessibility:** Residents who prefer or rely on digital services (e.g., online applications, appointment booking) may find it difficult to interact with the Council. This can be particularly problematic for those with disabilities or limited mobility.
- **Inefficient Service Delivery:** Without a digital focus, the Council may struggle to streamline processes and modernise service delivery. This can lead to longer wait times, complex procedures, and resident frustration.
- **Information Gap:** Residents may not have easy access to important information or updates from the Council. This can lead to confusion and a feeling of being disconnected from local government.
- **Inefficiency and Waste:** Manual or outdated processes can be time-consuming and resource-intensive. This can lead to higher operational costs and reduced productivity for council staff.
- **Security Risks:** Legacy systems may be more vulnerable to cyberattacks, putting sensitive resident data at risk.
- **Data Silos and Lack of Visibility:** Without a digital strategy, data may be scattered across different systems, making it difficult to get a holistic view of council operations and resident needs.
- **Difficulty Attracting Talent:** In today's job market, qualified professionals are likely to be drawn to organisations that embrace technology and offer modern work environments.
- **Negative Perception:** a council that is perceived as lagging behind in digital adoption may be seen as out of touch and unresponsive to resident needs. This can damage the council's reputation and erode public trust
- **Missed Opportunities:** Digital transformation can unlock new possibilities for resident engagement, service delivery, and cost savings. Without a strategy, the council may miss out on these opportunities to improve.

8.2 The risks of not having a digital transformation strategy are significant and multifaceted. By embracing digital technologies and creating a clear roadmap for change, the Council can ensure it remains secure, efficient, resident-focused, and well-positioned for the future.

## 9. Other implications

9.1 There are none.

## 10. Timetable for Implementation

10.1 As soon as practicable.

## 11. Conclusions

- 11.1 This report and associated strategy has highlighted the potential of digital transformation, emphasising its ability to keep data secure, enhance resident services, optimise council operations, and empower staff.
- 11.2 While challenges like budgetary constraints and potential resistance to change exist, these can be overcome through a well-defined strategy, effective communication, and a focus on measurable outcomes, ultimately fulfilling the Council's core mission of serving its residents.
- 11.3 It is recommended that members should:
- Develop a communication plan to inform staff and residents about the new approach.
  - Implement training programs to equip staff with the skills needed to deliver exceptional service.
  - Regularly monitor key performance indicators to track progress and identify areas for improvement.
- 11.4 By embracing a customer-centric philosophy within a secure digital environment, the Council can build stronger relationships with residents, enhance service delivery, and ensure a thriving future for the community.

## 12. Background papers

None

## 13. Appendices

- Appendix 1 Digital Services Strategy 2017-2020
- Appendix 2 Digital Transformation Strategy 2024-2027
- Appendix 3 Equality Impact Assessment Questionnaire