# TECHNOLOGY STRATEGY

## 2023 - 2028

NEWCASTLE UNDER LYME BOROUGH COUNCIL

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# 1. Foreword

The Council recognises the huge technological changes that have taken place over the last few years and how these are rapidly transforming our lives – whether that's how we shop, travel, work, communicate or eat. It is important therefore that every organisation adopts new ways of working to benefit from these new technologies, and Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council is no different.

Alongside this, the Government recently set out their ambition to make the UK a science and technology superpower and to prioritise economic growth. As a local council, we are focused on unlocking and leading economic growth in our Borough and see technology as a key driver through which to achieve this.

Our new Technology Strategy sets out the Council's vision for the next five years; outlining how we will use and promote technology to provide high-quality, responsive, and efficient services and opportunities for our residents, businesses, and visitors. Our aim is for the Borough to be recognised as a forward-thinking and innovative place that adopts digital technologies to improve and enhance the lives of our residents and outcomes for our businesses.

The Council will work to further develop our 'digital first' approach, in line with the principles of our One Council programme. Identifying opportunities to improve the equality of services, adapting working practices and further refining our existing digital offer, whilst ensuring that we continue to provide choice of access to residents, businesses, and visitors.

Our 2023-2028 Technology Strategy will also underpin and support the delivery of the council's vision and four strategic priorities, as part of the Council Plan 2022 to 2026:

- One Council delivering for local people.
- A successful and sustainable growing borough
- Health, active and safe communities
- Town centres for all

**Cllr Simon Tagg**

Leader of the Council

**Martin Hamilton**

Chief Executive

## 2. Commitment

For most, digital technology is an essential part of daily life - whether shopping, banking online or keeping in touch with friends and family. This has changed how people expect to interact with the Council.

To meet these changing expectations, we need to enhance and expand our digital offer across all interactions. Much of this work has already begun, through our One Council programme, which in the last three years has delivered annual savings of one million pounds.

However, we're not stopping here. We need to expand and redefine our online services to make them as simple and user-friendly as possible, ensuring that they provide you with the information you need when you need it.

While many of our residents regularly use digital services in their day-to-day lives, some people do not feel as confident, and we're committed to ensuring that these people are not left behind.

Our new Technology Strategy seeks to build a framework for the council's future service delivery and engagement with customers, using digital technologies.

## 3. Vision

This strategy describes how the council will use modern technologies and digital tools to enable, enhance and redefine how services are delivered to both internal and external customers.

Central to this strategy is tackling the digital divide: the gap between those with access to digital devices, connectivity, and skills, and those without.

Over the last decade, the use of technology has changed dramatically. Large public sector organisations have set a new level of expectation regarding the access, ease of use, availability, and functionality of digital services – and it is now clear that customers expect local government and other public services to meet these same expectations.

Therefore, as an organisation, we need to understand the latest technological changes and how these can benefit our service delivery and overall effectiveness. This change will provide a foundation from which to exploit opportunities such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), Internet of Things (IoT), 5G and Virtual Reality (VR).

This strategy sets out the council's approach to the required changes, along with our vision for a digital first, modern council which will:

- Make it easy and inclusive for residents, businesses, and visitors to access our services 24/7/365.
- Develop easy-to-use, accessible, and inclusive online services, alongside our more traditional methods of access.
- Support opportunities for digital jobs and investment.
- Work with partners to build a digital borough.
- Support business growth through technological advancements and connectivity e.g., fibre broadband, 5G.

To deliver this vision, we will need to ensure technology is embedded and embraced by all service areas across the council and tailored for residents, businesses, and visitors. Whilst it is key that our digital offerings keep pace with new technologies, we must do this in an inclusive way that supports all.

## 4. Where are we?

**Number of residents –** 123,300 (2021 census)

**Annual Website visitors – 298973** (Nov 2022 to October 2023)

**Monthly active MyAccount users –** 30k active users per month

**Inbound Telephony Calls in last 12 months** – 100k

**Emails** – Over 500k

**Forms submitted online** – 75487 (Nov 2022 to October 2023)

**Online Payments (inc Website, Direct Debit) –** 91% of payments now completed online

**Broadband Connectivity** - 97% of residents have access to Superfast broadband (>=30 Mbps), although only 45% have access to full fibre (FTTP or FTTH). [ThinkBroadband.com]

# 5. Strategic Themes and Actions

We will do this by focusing on three strategic themes:

## Residents & Customer

***What it means:***

- *Supporting our residents, businesses, and visitors to access the services and information they require online. Whilst ensuring we provide a choice of access for those who are not digitally connected.*
- Providing as many services online as possible, so our customers can book, order, report, pay and connect with us digitally.
- Harnessing automation, self-service, and Artificial Intelligence (AI) to support service delivery and efficiency.
- Maintaining a clear understanding our residents, businesses, and visitors and their service requirements.
- Being an accessible and inclusive council.

**Aims**

- Improve our digital services so that our residents, visitors, and businesses use them as their preferred method of contacting the Council.
- Develop a single view of the customer by joining our data and systems together.
- Learn from the best public and private sector organisations, ensuring that our services are simple, intuitive, and inclusive.
- Focus the design of digital services on the complete customer journey. Ensuring that from first contact, progress updates and final closure of a case, customers have access to the information they require.
- Develop the customer portal to include as many council services as possible, allowing residents to self-serve.
- Develop the use of technologies such as AI, chatbots and robotics to improve customer service and access.
- Support our residents and businesses to become more digitally aware.
- Ensure that our website is rated highly nationally on the Sitemorse Index accessibility reports and is compliant with the Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) Accessibility Regulations 2018.

## Workforce

*What it means:*

- Ensuring our workforce has the digital skills required to deliver services to our customers, as effectively and efficiently as possible, as well as the capacity for continuous learning and adaptation to respond to developments and changes.
- Providing the necessary tools to support the exploitation of data and data-led decision-making.
- Rationalise data and systems to remove duplicity and manual processing.
- Ensuring compliance with the General Data Protection Act 2018 by following the 'Data Protection Principles'
- Support the core themes of our People Strategy by creating an engaged, empowered and developed workforce.

**Aims**

- Ensure our staff have access to the most appropriate technologies to support their role e.g., laptops, mobile devices, data dashboards, software etc.
- Support our workforce with the digital skills they need to deliver services more efficiently and effectively, working towards becoming a paperless and sustainable organisation.
- Provide staff with the tools to work remotely or in the 'field'.
- Ensure data, information and insight are used to improve services and service delivery.
- Create a culture of agility that allows the council to respond, adapt and harness new technologies to support service delivery.
- Ensure our recruitment and workforce planning processes support the recruitment of a digitally skilled workforce.
- Ensure Councillors have access to appropriate technology that is fit for purpose and supports their role within the community.
- Contribute to the Government's ambition to place the UK at the forefront of technology.

## Infrastructure

*What it means:*

- *Work to enhance the technological infrastructure within the Borough, supporting access to high-speed fibre broadband and internet connectivity.*
- *Work with partners to develop employment and growth opportunities.*
- *Ensure the security of data and systems through effective cyber-security controls, supporting our compliance with the [General Data Protection Act 2018](#).*

**Aims**

- Ensure investment in digital infrastructure leads to improved and enhanced customer access and services.
- Support the Government's full-fibre and 5G network connectivity initiatives and programmes, promoting economic growth and development.
- Explore opportunities to integrate technological infrastructure and systems with partners.
- Ensure our infrastructure and IT systems remain fit for purpose and agile to future requirements.
- Implement effective cyber-security controls and defences to provide a safe and secure IT environment.
- Migrate to cloud technologies, decommissioning our IT data centres to realise cost savings and environmental sustainability benefits.
- Utilise the latest technologies across our systems and websites.

## 6. Digital Inclusion

The [UK Digital Inclusion Strategy](#) suggests that there are a number of barriers that can affect people from using digital services, including:

- **Access** – not everyone has the capability to connect to the internet.
- **Skills** – not everyone has the skills to use digital technologies and devices.
- **Trust** – some people lack trust in digital technology, for fear of becoming the victim of cybercrime or not knowing where to start.
- **Motivation** – knowing the reasons why using the internet is a good thing

Digital inclusion is central to our strategy. Whilst we aim for our digital services to become the default and efficient method of access, we understand there is a requirement for us to provide a choice of access for those who do not have the access or skills to use digital technologies.

As an organisation, we will aim to improve confidence, access, and skills by:

- **Design** – designing our systems and websites in line with the Government's [Digital Inclusion checklist](#) ensuring that they are easy-to-use, accessible, and inclusive.
- **Awareness** – presenting all available options to contact the Council, whilst continuing to highlight that our digital services remain the most efficient method of access.
- **Training** – promoting partners and local support groups who offer digital training and support ([Staffordshire Community Learning](#), [Citizens Online](#))
- **Access** – increasing the number of free-to-use computers in key locations, such as council buildings.
- **Connectivity** – enhancing the Borough's connectivity to the internet through the deployment of full-fibre broadband and free Wi-Fi access in Council buildings.

## 7. Cloud Computing

Cloud Computing is the delivery of on-demand delivery of IT resources and infrastructure over the internet. Instead of buying, owning, and maintaining physical data centres and servers, Cloud Computing allows access the latest technology services on a pay-as-you-use basis.

There are many associated benefits of cloud computing:

- **Sustainability** – Reduction in the on-premises energy consumption and physical hardware requirements.
- **Agility** – Quickly and easily access the latest technologies as and when they are released.
- **Elasticity** – Pay for what you use. Allowing you to quickly scale-up and down to meet demand without having to over-provision resources up-front.
- **Cost Savings** – Remove the large up-front costs of purchasing IT hardware, along with the ongoing contracts for electricity, maintenance, air conditioning and security.

Moving away from on-premises infrastructure and towards cloud computing will enable the council to operate at scale, maximise efficiency and drive greater savings and sustainability.

## 8. Cyber Security

Cyber security is a growing risk to both the private and public sector, with the ever-present threat of data loss, hacking, and ransom attacks. This is predominantly due to the large amount of sensitive data and assets of value to cyber criminals and hackers.

It is therefore imperative that the council allocates a proportional amount of resource towards the implementation and maintenance of suitable cyber defence measures to keep cybercriminals at bay. Alongside, regular security testing, auditing, and patching, adherence to the Future Network for Government (previously Public Services Network) standards and reviews of threat detection and protection systems.

## 9. Customer Relationship Management (CRM)

A strong Customer Relationship Management (CRM) platform is the foundation on which to develop a single view of our customers and neighbourhoods, as well as enabling the delivery of complex and varied services to residents.

The key deliverables of the platform include:

- A single, online, easy-to-use 'front door' for interactions with the council, accessible 24 hours a day.
- The ability to check on a request or report and see the progress.
- Operational efficiency and effectiveness through automation and AI.
- Data reporting to support data-led decision-making, improvements, and analysis of performance.
- Consolidation of systems and processes.
- Agility to support future requirements of the council.

The continued development, refinement and review of the councils CRM solution will continue to support the principles of the [One Council](One Council) programme.

## 10.    Future Technology

This strategy highlights the need to continue to invest and move at pace to realise the potential of future technologies, we cannot therefore become complacent. Instead, we will need to continue to:

- Make investments in the latest technology to enable officers to undertake their roles effectively and efficiently.
- Make investments into our Cloud Computing solution to realise cost savings and other efficiencies, such as reductions in carbon footprint.
- Exploit existing investments in technology to realise the full potential. E.g., utilising the full product suite within our Microsoft 365 licensing.
- Identify and realise savings through system rationalisation and efficiency. Alongside, opportunities for joint procurement, where these highlight cost savings or benefits for NuLBC.
- Exploit new technologies to drive efficiency, automation, and innovation e.g., robotics, AI, IoT and VR.
- Promote the importance of strong cyber-security defences and allocate resources accordingly.
- Allocate future funding to continue to develop our technology estate.
- Receive the commitment, engagement and support of all employees and members.

## 11. Governance

Adopting the right technologies, systems, processes, and culture is crucial to not only the success of this strategy, but the wider success of the Council. However, with change and technological advancement comes existential risk. It is therefore essential that the council implements robust governance measures, ensuring that we:

- ✓ Understand the needs of our residents, businesses, visitors, and colleagues.
- ✓ Manage both our business-as-usual operations and complex change programmes carefully.
- ✓ Use resources effectively and efficiently.
- ✓ Invest cautiously, understanding risk vs reward.
- ✓ Prioritise thoughtfully and intuitively.
- ✓ Innovate safely.
- ✓ Remain agile to change.

Our Technology governance arrangements are designed to work alongside the Council's existing committees and working groups, such as Cabinet, 'Finance, Audit and Performance Scrutiny' (FAPS), Information Governance Group, Technology Steering Group alongside regular portfolio holder briefings. These arrangements are intended to set the strategic direction, simplify processes, support cross-departmental collaboration, and prioritise the most important areas of need.

## 12. Summary

This strategy creates a foundation of technological advancements that will allow the council to continue to refine and develop for years to come.

The process of transformation is iterative. It is therefore important that as technology changes and develops, so must this strategy. One thing that should always remain unchanged is that our residents, businesses, and communities remain at the heart of everything we do.

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