

<b>Date</b>	<b>Version</b>	<b>Comments</b>
20 Oct 17	0.1	First draft – for comments
26 Oct 17	0.2	Second draft – for discussion
01 Nov 17	1.1	To DDW for discussion
23 Nov 17	1.2	Updated to go to GR for GDPR comment
25 Jan 18	1.3	Updated version to DDW and MR
26 Jan 18	1.4	To DC, KM, PS, CS and BP for comment
27 March 2018	1.5	To PDRC

Swale Borough Council  
Digital Strategy

Developed jointly with Mid-Kent Services

### **Purpose of Document**

The Swale Borough Council Digital Strategy describes how digital technologies will impact on our organisation's approaches to delivering services and contribute to strategic priorities between 2015-2018 and beyond.

This document articulates our aspirations for how we transform services to enable digital access where appropriate for the service. Our ambition is to make digital services easy to access and to support residents and businesses to live, work and enjoy our district. We are also aware of some of the barriers to digital that exist in our communities and this document will be clear that we will not be digital by default, but digital by choice.

The introduction to the strategy and the section describing Our Future Organisations has been jointly written by officers representing the digital and ICT functions of the three Councils comprising Mid-Kent Services.

The purpose of joining together to write these sections of the strategy are to align our future approaches to working in the digital age and consequently provide a clear and coherent set of priorities for our shared ICT service to work to.

## **Introduction**

The Digital Revolution is changing the world, creating new structures and models for commerce, politics and society which empower and connect people across the world.

The pace of change driven by technology over the past 10 years has been breathtaking. It will only increase in the next 10 years and though it often seems there is little we can do to stop it, we must be prepared as an organisation to meet the future. For every negative we might perceive of the digital age, there are consequential benefits and opportunities to be taken.

Airbnb is an example of the sharing economy made possible by the internet – sellers of services are matched with people who want to buy or hire them. Established commercial companies are undercut by start-ups which operate with much lower overheads. What impact does this have on our high streets and businesses? Could the sharing economy revolutionise the provision of public services?

Social media has the ability to support communities and increase public engagement, whether this is through messages relayed during times of crisis or through increased access to lectures and talks through platforms such as TED. Could social media offer the opportunity to empower communities to join together to look after and improve their neighbourhoods?

Edward Snowden, WikiLeaks and the Panama Papers demonstrate the consequences when corporate data is made publicly available. For better or worse, the power of information no longer lies in who holds it, but how it is used. Appropriate publishing of our own data assets offers benefits for transparency, accountability and driving innovation in the public sector.

Understanding the context within which this Digital Strategy has been written requires no more than looking at the world outside the Civic Centre - there is no aspect of our lives that has not been touched upon in some way by advancing technology.

## **Digital in our Strategic Plans**

Partners under the Mid-Kent Services umbrella have set out expectations and aspirations for future service delivery in their strategic plans.

### **Swale Borough Council**

Corporate Plan 2015-18

“...an organisation which continuously and actively seeks new ways of achieving better results at lower cost and in which all employees are supported to experiment and innovate to improve the way they do their jobs...”

“... a council whose ongoing financial viability is largely independent of the decisions made by central government and is less dependent on grant funding...”

“... improve resident’s perceptions and customer experience...”

“... encourage innovation at every level...”

“... enhance our capacity for achieving outcomes collaboratively...”

### **Tunbridge Wells Borough Council**

Excerpts from Our Five Year Plan

“...over the next five years the funding we receive for local services will disappear...”

“...residents increasingly use digital technology to find out about and access our services...”

“...technological advances provide opportunities for reviewing the way we deliver services and remain in contact with our customers...”

“...all of our business that can be done digitally, will be done digitally...”

## **Maidstone Borough Council**

### Values from the Strategic Plan

“Service - Everything we do impacts on our customers, both internal and external. We will listen to and understand their needs, then take action to provide the right service in a positive and professional manner.”

“Integrity - We work with our partners and customers to create a feeling of openness and transparency in everything we do.”

“Value – ...aiming to get the maximum effect for every penny of public money we spend.

“Equality - ...services that are fair and easy to access.”

## **Transformation Challenge Award**

The partnership has also been awarded £569,000 of funding from the DCLG's Transformation Challenge Award, which commits the Councils to developing better online services, improving customer satisfaction and delivering efficiency savings, with the following objectives:

- Implement Digital First strategies that will increase digital take up and reduce email and face to face contact by 70 percent, and telephone contact by 50 percent, improving website satisfaction to 80 percent “good”, and removing barriers to telephone contact for officers, Councillors and members of the public.
- Reduce MKS's cost to serve by implementing Digital First, together with Lean and Mindspace methodology, saving up to £8 million over 10 years.
- Implement customer insight and business intelligence technology to monitor, manage and shape service trends and demand, offering this capability to other public services and creating the potential to dramatically reduce costs to the public purse within the region.
- Provide a blueprint for partnership working within the region, and nationally, to cascade the learning and benefits to other organisations.

## **Our Future Organisations**

This strategy aims to describe how our organisations will deliver services in three to five years time, the impact on our citizens, workforce, community & partners and the contribution that ICT & Digital technology will make. We do not know what is around

the corner. A new development in technology or a change in legislation could change our operating environment beyond recognition. We can plan only based on what we know now.

## **Councillors**

Councillors have an integral part to play in promoting the digital services that the council offers. As an organisation we can support this by ensuring that all Councillors have the opportunity to learn the skills required and by ensuring that our online services are among the best, so they can promote them with confidence.

## **Citizens**

Acting as a council that embraces digital technology will mean putting our citizens at the centre of any digital change as well as evolving and maintaining an internal digital culture. We must be aware of those who cannot or choose not to use digital and ensure that there are non-digital channels for those who need them. We must also continuously improve the digital services we provide.

- We will continue to develop a consistent approach to online services, both in terms of the look and approach to what we offer.
- We will ensure that the services provided online inspire confidence from customers; they don't crash, information is passed on correctly and any information we provide is up-to-date
- We will ensure that if there is a major business continuity issue then all services will continue to be able to deliver their services without the need for technology
- We will make sure that we incorporate customer feedback into any changes
- Where consent is the most appropriate lawful basis for processing, we will be clear about how citizens and customers can freely opt in and opt out of future communications with us under the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR)
- We will support customers to do it themselves and work towards improving digital skills across the borough, through schemes such as the Digital Champions at the Gateway.

The better our online services are, the faster our citizens will move away from choosing traditional methods of contact, like the phone, to digital interactions.

## **Workforce**

Even with advances in technology we will continue to need committed and motivated people to deliver our services. Changing demands require them to be more mobile, flexible and cover a wider range of tasks and activities than ever before. Future digital technology, improved communications and transformational change will allow our workforce to operate from anywhere. In five year's time, we imagine that:

- Our workforce will continue to deliver excellent customer service using technology and processes designed to support them in their work.

- Moving to digital working will help keep individual workloads manageable by reducing administrative work.
- Staff will feel empowered to change what doesn't work and there will be opportunities to gain skills relevant to the modern workplace.
- Staff will spend time with citizens who have complex needs because everyday transactions and requests for information will be dealt with digitally.
- Culture will continue to be 'can-do' with a shift in emphasis towards enabling and assisting people to access Council services themselves.
- We will review our systems at regular intervals to ensure that we are using them in a way that maximises the efficiency of our staff
- We will equip our working environment to enable our staff to maximise their productivity by working digitally.
- Staff will have technology that meets their role's requirements, which securely connects to our systems and provides the flexibility to operate from anywhere.
- Our shared services will be able to operate and access their information from any of the partner's sites.

### **Community and Partners**

We are a trusted and integral part of our community, working to improve outcomes for all through close working with a wide variety and number of organisations. Reducing digital exclusion relies on improving access, skills and motivation to use the internet and trust in online services. Together with our partners we can reduce digital exclusion and promote a local economy maximising the use of digital and technology to benefit our Boroughs.

- We will encourage the use of technologies to improve quality of life for our residents.
- We will communicate with our partners to enlist their support in promoting our online services. This will include through Kent Association of Local Councils (KALC) and community groups to increase the number of people who are using council services online.
- Where appropriate our partners - e.g. KCC and Housing Associations - will be able to use our Customer Account portal to provide their services and vice versa.

### **Technology and Service Re-design**

When we look to review the services we provide we will ensure that they are fit for purpose in meeting the needs and demands of our citizens. We will understand that demand first before we see how technology can enhance the experience of doing business with us.

We will use technology only where it improves our citizens' experience and will strive to get service right first time. By improving our services and incorporating digital tools we anticipate that our citizens will choose to move away from traditional

methods of contact to digital interactions including how we communicate with our citizens.

Going digital is less about IT technologies and hardware and more about better services for citizens, available when they need them. We want to develop a culture internally and externally that ensures that digital is the preferred choice of the majority of our citizens

### **Links to our Customer Access Strategy**

The Digital Strategy for Swale is closely linked to the 2013 Customer Access Strategy where we articulated the need to improve the way customers access services and change how we engage with customers. The principles outlined in the Customer Access Strategy as below are still applicable.

- All of our services are delivered with our customers' needs and preferences in mind and in accordance with the stated service standards
- There is an appropriate and convenient choice of ways to access our services; whilst we will introduce more self service facilities as a means of customer access, we appreciate the importance of maintaining face to face and telephone access for those who need or prefer such methods
- We have a clear knowledge and understanding of our customers' needs
- Our customers will, wherever possible, have to contact us only once and may easily track the progress of their enquiries
- We will deliver the services in an efficient and cost effective manner

### **Links to our Communications Strategy**

The Communication Strategy sets out a clear ambition around improving the digital offer to residents and business through the following avenues:

- An improved website with enhanced functionality
- Improved social media presence
- Increased digital communications