



# Digital Strategy

## 2023-28

## Foreword

Cabinet Member for Service Transformation and Deputy Leader

“Digital technology has transformed how people live, learn and work. Use of the internet has grown significantly over the past twenty years to the point where it is now regarded as the fourth utility. Like no other time in our history, everyone can access immense amounts of information at the touch of a button; and the devices people can buy are getting smaller, cheaper, and more convenient every year.

Cabinet approved the first Digital Strategy in November 2015 and significant progress has been made over the past seven years. This new and revised strategy builds on these solid foundations. It is not about technology for the sake of it, rather about using digital to improve quality of life for Swansea residents, businesses and visitors.”

## Introduction

Over the past seven years Swansea Council has:

- Significantly improved and expanded the way residents and businesses can report, request, apply, and pay for services via its website. The use of online forms has increased by more than 50% over the past five years
- Been working to improve digital connectivity and broadband across the city and county and has begun the journey towards becoming a smart city
- Significantly improved the Council’s internal digital infrastructure and systems to support staff and Councillors and increase efficiency
- Supported residents with digital training and advice
- Delivered hundreds of digital projects including areas such as automation, paperless working, internet of things, and the Swansea Account for residents and businesses.

This Digital Strategy 2023-28 builds on what has already been achieved and aims to contribute to wider partnership strategies.

## Our digital goals

1. Excellent Customer Service aligned with our service standards
2. People focused digital services
3. Resilient digital infrastructure and systems
4. Accessible data that supports communities and council performance
5. Digitally skilled and confident workforce and communities
6. A digitally connected city and county

## Our guiding principles

**People Focused** - We put citizens, communities, businesses and our partners at the heart of everything we do, working with them whenever possible to design services based on what they want and need.

**Collaborative** - We support collaboration across the Council and with our partners to co-ordinate our work.

**Open and Transparent** - We make decisions based on data and evidence and publish our targets and results.

**Innovative** - We embrace new ways of working and continuously modernise our tools, technology and places.

**Secure** - We work tirelessly to secure all data and information we use.

## Key desired outcomes

- Customers have a consistently positive experience when accessing council services and ideally would be involved in their design
- Citizens are supported to develop digital skills that can enhance their lives
- Wherever possible council processes are digital from end-to-end
- Digital services are designed and delivered around people's needs
- Digital infrastructure and systems are safe, efficient and support the achievement of the council's priorities
- Evidence that decision-making and performance has been improved through improved business intelligence
- The Council has the capacity and capability it needs to deliver the digital strategy
- Swansea is a Smart city with digital infrastructure that supports the local economy.

## How we will measure our performance

- Compliance with the Council's published customer service standards
- Volume of justified complaints to the Council (stage 1 and stage 2)
- Number of automated processes (end to end)
- Number of payments completed online
- Number of Swansea Account users
- Number of digital innovation projects completed
- Amount of open data available to communities
- Number of Enhanced Employment and Learning opportunities
- Number of Smart City projects delivered
- Feedback from our service users wherever possible.

## Why We Need a Digital Strategy

The council has ambitious plans for the city and county of Swansea which are set out in our corporate plan, which is currently being updated for 2023.

Digital technology is already being used as a key strategic tool for supporting delivery of the council's well-being objectives:

**Safeguarding people from harm:** we are using digital solutions (e.g., assistive technology to support independent living) and working with health colleagues to integrate services and systems

**Improving Education & Skills:** we are providing virtual learning, teaching communities, online networks, development portals and open data, and sustainable digital solutions for schools

**Transforming our Economy & Infrastructure:** we are working towards becoming a Smart City and facilitating a super-fast infrastructure to support tech start-ups employment, and tourism

**Tackling Poverty and Enabling Communities:** we are increasing digital skills and digital inclusion to improve people's access to employment, online retail discounts, reduce isolation, increase outcomes for young people, and save time when dealing with the Council

**Delivering on Nature Recovery and Climate Change:** we are implementing new digital technologies and hardware that will support the natural environment and reduce the Council's carbon footprint

**Transformation and Financial Resilience:** we are using the latest digital tools and technologies to support innovation and efficiency, increasing e-democracy and redesigning services to improve effectiveness and accessibility, including involving our service users wherever possible. All in ways which aim to increase the Council's sustainability and financial resilience in the longer term.

However, the council will need to tackle numerous external and internal challenges as it seeks to achieve its objectives over the coming years and digital technology will be more important than ever in helping the council to do this.

## **External Context**

There are a wide range of external factors that will impact on the council's priorities and the potential to use digital technology to meet them, including:

### **Political:**

- "Once for Wales" driver from the Future Generation Act, Chief Digital Officer for Local Government, and the WLGA which encourages collaboration around systems and service delivery

### **Economic:**

- The strength of the local labour market and pay and reward arrangements is affecting the council's ability to recruit and retain technical employees with the rights skills at the right time.
- Expected financial settlements and council tax levels will affect the resources available to fund council services and digital transformation
- Exponential increase in cyber-crime and cyber-attacks on public bodies
- Demand to improve core infrastructure and broadband for residents and businesses across Swansea.

### **Social:**

- High numbers of people in Swansea access the internet than the UK and Welsh average
- 86% of Swansea households had internet access at home in 2017-18.
- Swansea has relatively low rates of digital exclusion

- The pandemic has increased the pace of channel shift to online and telephone
- The cost of living crisis will lead to increased demand for services and customer contact

### **Technological:**

- Advances in digital technology are changing customer behaviour (with increasing demand for online services and expectations of 24/7 access to services) and creating opportunities for the workforce to make processes and services more responsive and efficient
- Remote working technologies support recruitment beyond the local labour market and help with employee retention
- Internet of Things, such as assistive technologies (e.g. personal alarms, fingerprint recognition); sensors (e.g. to detect air pollution, car park availability and bin capacity); and pushing alerts to smartphones.

### **Legal:**

- As opportunities arise to share data across boundaries, we will need to ensure appropriate governance is in place to protect data and meet legislative requirements.

### **Environmental:**

- Climate change is driving increased agile working and digital customer service channels due to reduced travel (although this may be impacted in the short term by the cost-of-living crisis).

### **Global:**

- Global influences on digital technology may lead to pressure from customers to embrace new digital solutions more quickly than is affordable.

## **Internal Context**

The council provides or commissions more than two hundred services across a range of functions from education and social care to environmental health and leisure services. We have 12,000+ employees, including around 6,000 in schools, all of whom use digital technology to fulfil their roles.

Some key internal factors that will impact on the council's ability to use digital technology to support delivery of its priorities within the constraints of the Medium-Term Financial Plan include:

- **Workforce capacity:** sufficient capacity will be needed to make the most of the opportunities digital technology has to offer
- **Recruitment and retention:** there are significant challenges in recruiting and retaining staff with the necessary skills

- **Agile working:** Prior to the pandemic the organisation had adopted an agile working policy that enabled employees to work remotely, and this was applied to all office-based staff in 2020 and has been in operation ever since
- **Automation:** The council has already begun the journey on using automation online and over the telephone and the programme on this will continue
- Increasing democracy and inclusion by continuing to evolve **hybrid meetings**
- Recognition that digital is as much about **change management and people** as it is about technology
- **Skills gaps** exist relating to new technology and change management both within Digital Services and across the wider organisation
- **Our workforce are customers too** and they expect the same digital experience at work as they have in their personal lives.

## Our vision for a Digital Swansea

**To use digital technology to improve people’s lives, to enable digital access to services 24 hours a day, and to improve operational efficiency**

## Strategic Goals

### 1. Excellent Customer Service aligned with our service standards

People now expect to be able to access council services on any smart phone or computer device at a time to suit them. We therefore need to design our services around the needs of our citizens, communities and businesses, using technology to make them as accessible and inclusive as possible.

#### **What we have done already:**

- ✓ Introduced the latest unified communications technology for the routing of phone calls and now on a stable and resilient platform
- ✓ Begun to the journey to introduce automation so staff can focus on the more complex cases
- ✓ The single citizen account has been implemented and this will be expanded with more services through the life of this strategy.

#### **What we will do by 2028:**

- Work to maintain a range of local contact channels that supports digital
- Support the most vulnerable and older people when applying for / accessing public services
- Design access channels based on customers’ experiences and feedback and through the involvement of our service users
- Make it easier for everyone to contact us

- Review and publish our service standards so residents and businesses know what to expect when they contact the Council.

## **2. People Focused Digital Services**

Digital services are about more than the customer interface and involve using digital technology to streamline, automate and speed up processes. This involves looking at our services with a focus on people's needs, and involving service users to identify ways in which they could be improved and how digital technology can help to make the services more effective and efficient.

### **What we have done already:**

- ✓ Significantly improved and expanded the way residents and businesses can report, request, apply, and pay for services via its website. The use of online forms has increased by more than 50% over the past five years
- ✓ Launched a new website which has significantly improved the user experience as ranked by Sitemorse
- ✓ Begun the use of automation, one example has saved over 600 hours of back office time within a service going paperless.

### **What we will do by 2028:**

- Expand the Swansea Account so residents and businesses can request, apply, and pay for a wide range of services online
- Ensure all our online services are fully accessible, by testing with our service users and representative stakeholder groups
- Continue to automate routine tasks so that our staff can focus on the more complicated and difficult tasks
- Ensure residents and businesses only have to share information with us once
- Re-design our processes and ways of working in order to offer support early, involving service users in the process.

## **3. Resilient Digital Infrastructure and Systems**

Without a resilient digital infrastructure and systems our digital ambitions would be undeliverable. Our customers and our workforce need to have the right tools and access to the right systems and data when they need them. We also need to ensure these systems and personal data are kept safe at all times.

### **What we have done already:**

- ✓ Software rationalisation has been delivered yielding savings and this will continue as an ongoing project

- ✓ Agile and mobile working has been enabled by digital tools/technology, improving services for residents and reducing office space
- ✓ Upgrading of the schools' infrastructure to enable the digital curriculum as well as full migration to Hwb.

**What we will do by 2028:**

- Provide robust, resilient, 'cloud first' infrastructure and software systems that are cost effective and minimise our carbon footprint
- Develop and procure applications which are scaleable and can be used for multiple purposes
- Continually innovate and develop a digital innovation roadmap and pipeline of projects
- Maintain and develop our cyber security and biometrics in order to keep the Council's data safe
- Joint procurement with partners locally, regionally and nationally wherever possible to realise economies of scale.

#### **4. Accessible data that supports communities and council performance**

Accessible, accurate, meaningful and timely data are essential in providing an understanding of people's needs and expectations as well as informing decision making and service design. High performing organisations use data and business intelligence to obtain feedback on customer experience and citizen needs / demand to inform policy and service design and development, as well as for self-assessment and performance management.

**What we have done already:**

- ✓ Improved corporate performance monitoring is live and in its second development cycle
- ✓ Business Intelligence software as part of Office 365 (Power BI) is now being used to deliver improved analytics for Housing reporting and monitoring the Council's progress on the Medium-Term Financial Plan
- ✓ New applications have been developed to manage the Council's risks.

**What we will do by 2028:**

- Join-up data in ways which supports improved decision-making and performance management
- Integrate data with our partners to improve understanding of demand and service design and planning
- Further roll out business intelligence software to improve employees' access to data analytics



- Make open data available to communities and involve service users to improve the accuracy of data
- Identify data champions across the Council who can support and lead this journey.

## **5. Digitally skilled and confident workforce and communities**

Swansea can benefit from a workforce and communities that have the skills and the confidence to make the most of the opportunities that are constantly emerging from new digital technologies. We need to keep abreast of new developments and to be able to embrace them with confidence.

This means building the right technical expertise in the organisation as well as ensuring the leadership and workforce have the digital and change management skills they need to work digitally and to support individuals and communities to do the same.

Helping citizens to embrace technology can significantly improve their life chances by:

- Helping people find work and increase their earning potential
- Offering improved learning opportunities
- Getting access to cheaper goods and services online
- Reducing loneliness and isolation, especially for the most vulnerable
- Being part of digital communities and participating in co-ordinated activities and initiatives.

### **What we have done already:**

- ✓ Enhanced Employment and Learning opportunities through the use of technology. This has included the increased use of digital equipment and training by Lifelong Learning and Employability programmes, providing Chromebook loan scheme for Employment programme participants and grant funded digital equipment supplied to partner organisations
- ✓ Developed Curriculum delivery methods to widen accessibility of learning opportunities. This includes blended and online courses across most subject areas, last year we attracted 25% of individuals who had never previously accessed Adult Learning
- ✓ Worked with partners and organisations to improve skills and streamline processes through sharing of good practice and collaborative training opportunities. This has included Jisc training for staff and learners ([www.jisc.ac.uk](http://www.jisc.ac.uk)), Adult Learning training partners and cross-partner whiteboard training.

### **What we will do by 2028:**

- Continue with the Lifelong Learning support to communities within available budgets
- Work with providers to devise development for staff and Councillors to increase digital skills and confidence
- Recruit for digital excellence including apprenticeships
- Work towards embedding the Digital 2030 Digital Standards
- Improve networking and sharing of best practice across digital professions.

## **6. A digitally connected city and county**

The provision of digital services can drive economic growth and support social inclusion and cohesion. As part of this, Swansea is aiming to develop smart urban areas to improve operations and services for residents, not only in the city centre but across high streets. Working with our partners and communities, this ambition aims to attract inward investment and also improve connectivity for residents.

### **What we have done already:**

- ✓ Implemented internet of things with the use of sensors both within the Council, e.g. room occupancy, and across the City, e.g. Monitoring pollution
- ✓ Begun work with both the Swansea Bay City Deal and telecommunications providers towards full fibre
- ✓ Begun a programme to upgrade CCTV and implement WiFi into high streets across Wards.

### **What we will do by 2028:**

- Develop a Smart City roadmap
- Work with the Swansea Bay City Deal digital programme to improve connectivity for residents and businesses and attract inward investment
- Support digital communities
- Increase the use of the Internet of Things to improve service efficiency and customer service
- Exploit any new infrastructure to improve Council services, improve safety, and increase digital access.