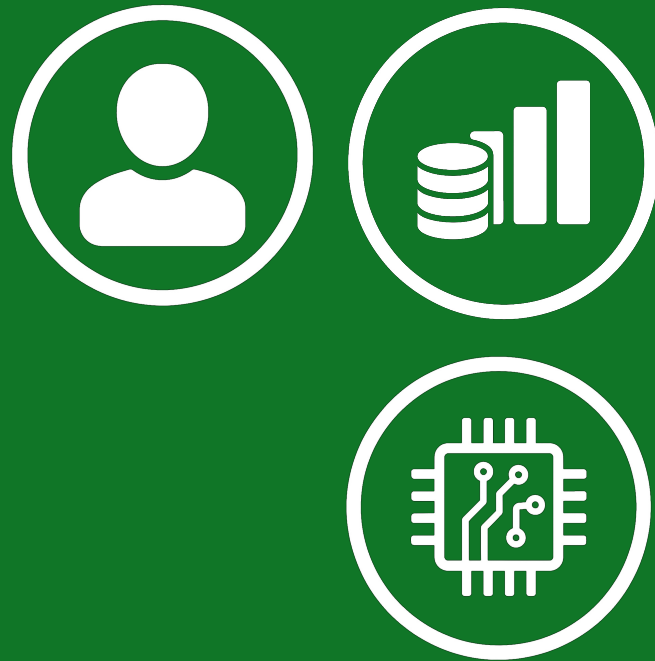


Digital Strategy

2025-2028



Introduction

Rochford District Council is entering a new phase of digital transformation. Building on recent investments in cloud technologies and digital platforms, this strategy sets out a clear direction for how we will continue to modernise our services and operations over the next three years.

The strategy is designed to support the delivery of the Council's corporate objectives, as outlined in Our Rochford, Our Plan 2024–2028, as well as to respond to the impending requirements of Local Government Reorganisation. It reflects our commitment to becoming a forward-thinking and well-managed authority.

At its core, this strategy is about improving the digital experience for our customers, members, and employees. It recognises that while digital services offer significant benefits in terms of accessibility, efficiency, and convenience, they must be designed inclusively ensuring that no one is left behind. We aim to create services that people choose to use because they are intuitive and effective, while maintaining high-quality alternatives for those who need them.

The strategy is structured around six key outcomes: better customer experiences, a digitally confident workforce, financial sustainability, strong and secure technology foundations, a data-informed organisation, and readiness for Local Government Reorganisation. These outcomes will be delivered through focused workstreams on user experience, data, and technology, underpinned by guiding principles and a robust implementation roadmap.

This document sets out not only what we intend to achieve, but how we will approach the work—collaboratively, securely, and with the needs of our community at the heart of every decision.

1. Strategic context

This strategy does not exist in a vacuum. Instead, must aim to support the delivery of the Council's corporate objectives and outcomes, It must also be considered in the context of wider public policy initiatives, including LGR, devolution and the digital agenda in central government.

Corporate plan

Rochford's corporate plan, Our Rochford, Our Plan 2024 - 2028 outlines the key themes and priority areas for the Council:

- Communities and Homes
- Places and Spaces
- Economy and Prosperity

As well as these themes, Rochford also has a commitment to being a forward thinking and well managed authority.

Impact on the digital strategy

As a core corporate function, digital is vital to the delivery of almost all areas of the Council's activities. However, there will be specific areas for the Council that will require action and investment to be prioritised to enable the effective delivery of the corporate plan.

These will be identified in an annual workplan of activities and projects linked to the delivery of this strategy.

Devolution & Local Government Reorganisation

Local government reorganisation (LGR) in Essex is entering a pivotal phase, shaped by national policy shifts and local strategic ambitions. During the development of this strategy, several configurations for reorganising Greater Essex have been proposed and debated, with outcomes expected in March 2026.

Councils in Essex have committed to both devolution and LGR and, following the release of the English Devolution White Paper in December 2024, a mayoral county combined authority for Essex is expected by April 2026.

Whilst exact future configurations are currently unconfirmed, what is certain is that such as these present a huge opportunity to deliver a step change in the way digital services are designed and delivered in future for the people in our area. We wish to be at the forefront of the thinking around organisation design, and digital strategy and planning start and collaborating with neighbouring authorities to make the eventual process of reorganisation as effective as possible.

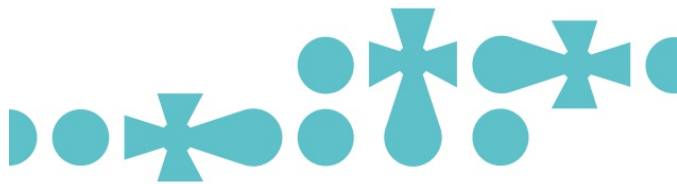
2. The government digital blueprint



A blueprint for modern digital government

A long-term vision for digital public services, a six-point plan for reform, and the role of the new digital centre of government

January 2025



The government's "A Blueprint for Modern Digital Government" sets out a strategic framework aimed at modernising digital services across the UK public sector. For local government, it underscores the importance of integration, skill development, user-focused service design, and collaborative efforts to enhance the digital experience for all citizens.

Recognising the unique challenges faced by local government, the blueprint advocates for a collaborative approach. This involves engaging with local authorities to co-create solutions that address specific local needs while aligning with the broader national digital strategy. The Local Government Association (LGA) has responded to the blueprint, highlighting the importance of partnership between central and local government in achieving these digital transformation goals.

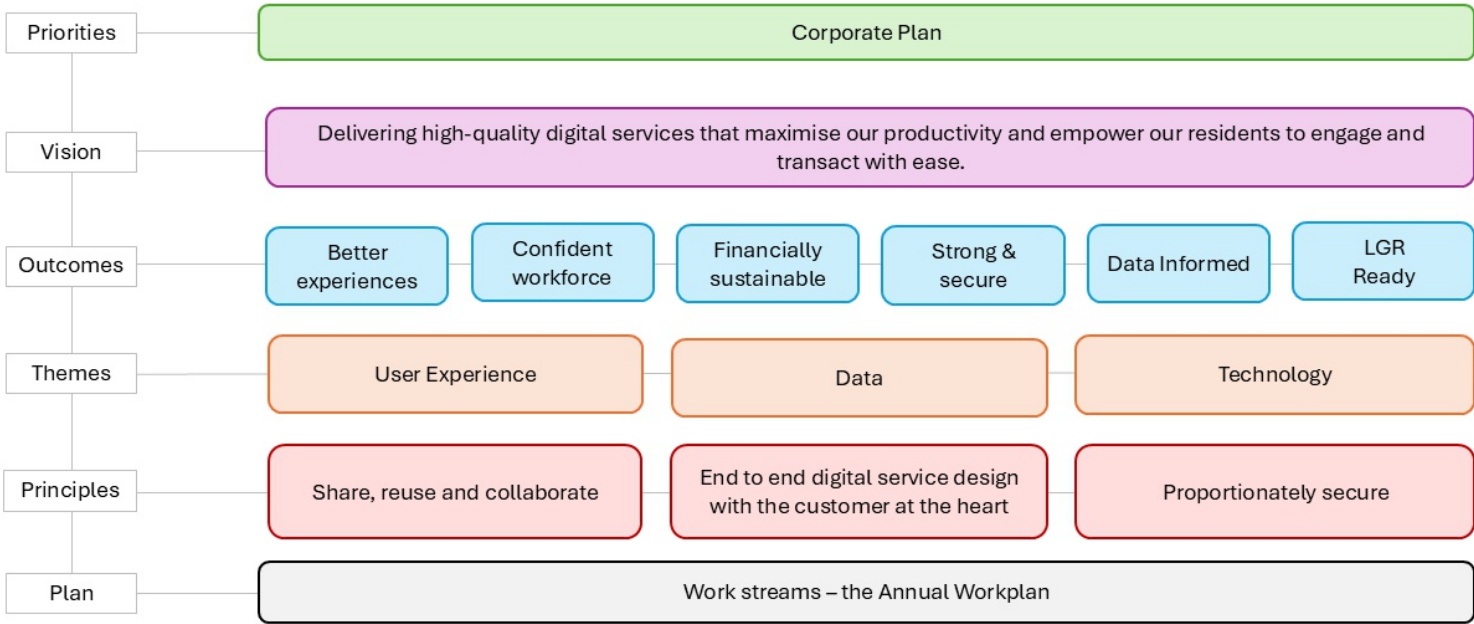
We must ensure that our strategy and the work we do to implement it, fits in with best practice across the wider public sector. Involve ourselves in innovative, collaborative projects with digital at the centre wherever it brings benefits to the people and communities of the Rochford District.

3.Our digital strategy

Our Vision

"Delivering high-quality digital services that maximise our productivity and empower our residents to engage and transact with ease."

The diagram below outlines our strategy and shows how it flows from workstreams through principles, through themes, to our digital outcomes and vision, and fundamentally supporting the delivery of the Council’s corporate objectives.



4. Defining digital

Our definition of digital is a broad one.

‘Digital’ doesn’t just cover technology, or things relating to the internet. Instead, it describes the age in which we are operating, one in which the vast majority of people have access to the internet almost all of the time (but not everybody, of course - more on that below). The impact that this has had on society is so great that it affects everything we do, and how we do it.

The biggest change is to the expectations that people have of the organisations they engage with - they want to be able to have their needs met at any time and in any place. They expect to be kept up to date with progress, and not to have to chase for updates. We must embrace this challenge and the opportunity to design our services to be more efficient and convenient for the people we serve.

5. When 'digital' is not the answer

It is important to highlight that delivering services online is not the answer to every problem we or our communities face. Digital solutions work extremely well for simple, transactional interactions, but they are not as well suited to complex situations or in cases where vulnerable people are involved. There are also cases where even for simple transactions, someone either does not have the access or the skills to use online services, or perhaps they choose not to do so for their own personal reasons.

Our strategy is predicated on making the Council's services accessible to people no matter what their situation. We do not intend to ‘channel shift’ people - effectively forcing them - to online channels because they may be easier for us.

Instead, our aim is to deliver digital services that are so good, people prefer to use them when they can. If we get this right, enough people will do so to create capacity within the Council to continue to meet the needs of more vulnerable members of the community.

We therefore must take digital exclusion into account when working with colleagues across the Council to redesign services. Ensuring a high-quality digital experience does not preclude having a high-quality experience using other channels.

Options to explore when considering include:

- Non-digital fall backs
- Assisted digital
- Digital access
- Digital skills development

6. Outcomes

Our outcomes define what will be the result of the strategy being implemented. What will be different?

1. Better experience for customers

The Council aims to make services accessible and convenient for everyone through user-centred digital design, encouraging people to choose online options while still providing alternatives for those unable to use the internet.

2. Digitally confident workforce

Our colleagues across the Council will possess the skills, knowledge, and mindset to effectively use available digital tools, ensuring technology is utilised confidently to achieve their best work.

3. Financial sustainability

The Council will achieve maximum efficiency and optimal budget utilisation by leveraging user experience, data, and technology to deliver more effective customer services,

4. Strong and secure technology foundations

The Council will benefit from core technology that enables the delivery of quality services meeting community needs, achieved by investing in an enterprise architecture approach to build shared, resilient, adaptive, inclusive, progressive, and secure technology foundations and platforms across infrastructure, systems, digital platforms, and data.

5. Data informed organisation

The Council will increase our data maturity to improve evidence-based decision making ensuring relevant data is accessible and usable

6. LGR ready

The Council is well-positioned to play a pivotal role in shaping the digital future of the local area as Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) progresses. The Council will demonstrate a proactive approach and strategic vision to lead in designing enhanced digital services for the new organisation.

7. Workstreams

With our broad understanding of ‘digital’, it is helpful to be clear about what is covered by this strategy. We have therefore broken the scope of digital into three core workstreams.

User experience

This element describes the services we provide through our digital channels. Increasingly, members of the public expect to be able to interact online with organisations, and we are no different.

The user experience we offer is made up of several of component parts, including:

- Our websites
- Our digital platforms of forms and workflows
- Third party portals

What’s more, we also want to ensure that the experiences for those working for and with the Council are equally good, whether members, staff, or volunteers. This applies to internal systems used to deliver services as well as communication and collaboration tools.



User experience example: better end to end online services

By adopting user centred service design approaches, we can improve our most accessed online services to make them easier to use, which will increase uptake and help us achieve our efficiency goals.

Data

We want our Council to become a data-informed organisation. We can use data to learn more about the communities of Rochford as well as how our services are performing. With this insight, we can redesign our services to better meet their needs. We can also use it to help us make decisions, ensuring we have all the facts available to us when weighing up various options. Our ambition is that during the life-cycle of this strategy, ultimately, we could start to use predictive data to intervene early and prevent needs arising in the first place.

Our data approach is an agile, iterative one that aims to experiment, find what works, and then scale from there. We are choosing not to launch into large scale data projects - such as establishing 'single customer records' or corporate data warehouses - but rather to focus on specific use cases, only bringing data together where there is a good reason to do so. By adopting this 'test and learn' methodology, we will realise the benefits of our data more quickly and with reduced risk levels.

Data presents a significant opportunity, and we have much to do in terms of people, process and technology to ensure we can fully grasp it.



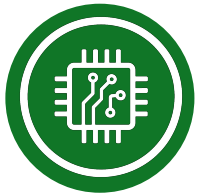
Data example: using our data to improve service performance

By investing in our data platforms and capabilities, we can start to identify patterns that enable the Council to improve internal performance and run improve service efficiency

Technology

Technology is core to the operation of the Council, and we must ensure that ours is always robust and reliable. We are living and working through a period of rapid and sustained technological change, which directly impacts upon the needs and expectations of the people our Council serves.

All of our digital services are dependent on technology for their delivery, from a customer submitting a request online, to the systems used by officers to meet that request; from financial systems that ensure our suppliers are paid, to the software that helps us calculate the benefit payments people are entitled to.



Technology example: boosting productivity with AI

By making effective use of emerging AI technology, we can boost the productivity of all our service areas. This will involve us running pilots to identify the best use cases, and upskilling colleagues to be able to make the most of them, whilst ensuring our data remains safe, and that we don't overuse the technology to the detriment of the climate.

8. Principles

The following strategic principles will guide both what work is undertaken within our action plan to implement the strategy, and also how that work will be approached, to ensure everything we do contributes towards our vision.

1. Share, reuse, collaborate

We will aim to develop solutions that can be shared, and that are based on existing good practice, produced in collaboration with partners. We have already had success in focusing on either open-source platforms or other technologies that encourage the sharing of ideas and solutions. As we move into local government reorganisation, this culture and approach will be more necessary than ever.

2. End to end digital service design with the customer at the heart

Projects should focus on meeting people's needs, which will then deliver for the Council too. We will adopt a user-centred service design approach to our digital work, placing service users at the heart of our efforts. By doing so, we will encourage the uptake of digital services, thereby achieving our outcomes regarding efficiency and accessible services.

3. Proportionately secure

To ensure our systems and processes keep data and information safe; while still enabling us to do our best work, we must balance security with the need for flexible and collaborative working. Our approach is detailed in the appended cyber security strategy.

9. Implementing the strategy

This strategy is ambitious, and requires a dedicated approach to implementation, that aligns with existing Council governance arrangements.

Digital strategy action plan and governance

Decisions around our user experience, data, and technology workloads will utilise existing governance arrangements, to establish clear decision making and accountability processes. This will ensure:

- Any digital work is completed in alignment with this strategy, including the outcomes and principles
- Digital expertise is brought in as early as possible to projects to ensure the right decisions are made
- Data is considered in decision making and service design, providing an evidence base for our choices

We will report on progress on our action plan to the relevant committees on an agreed basis.

We will create an annual action plan outlining all the work that falls under the digital umbrella, to enable us to prioritise effectively and communicate to the rest of the Council, and beyond, what we are working on and why. The action plan will be reviewed regularly to ensure it takes account of the latest developments of the Council.

All digital work will need to help us achieve at least one of the outcomes in this strategy, and to demonstrate how it will be delivered in line with the principles.

Capability and capacity

The Council is a relatively small authority, without the large resources available to bigger councils, and so ambitions must be realistic within the window of resources available.

To deliver our roadmap, we will therefore need to bring in specialist skills where necessary, as well as increasing the digital confidence and skills of our staff.

Digital, Data and Technology Services



an average month We :
review 22,000,000 security events
have 3000+ cyber alarms triggered
carryout 17 detailed investigations

each month We received:
100,000+ emails



everyday We:
protect over 45TB data

in the last 12 month We have:
received 2,300+ service requests
supported 275+ licensed users



We support:
200+ applications
across 65+ application servers

We support:
350+ end user devices
across 7 sites and remotely

