



Cabinet

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Public

Digital Strategy Report

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Service Area:	Enabling Services
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Electoral Divisions Affected	N/A
Key Decision?	Non-Key
Cabinet Forward Plan	May 21 st 2026
Report considered by	

1. Purpose of Report

1. Shropshire Council is at a pivotal moment. Rising demand, financial pressures and changing expectations mean the council must transform how it delivers services and supports communities.

The Digital Strategy 2026–2030 sets out a clear, people centred approach to this transformation. It focuses on using digital, data and automation to redesign services around real needs, reduce complexity and improve outcomes, while building a more sustainable and resilient organisation.

Through a single, integrated portfolio and a strong focus on measurable impact, the strategy establishes how the council will modernise services, strengthen capability and deliver long term financial sustainability.

2. Recommendations

1. Cabinet is asked to approve the Digital Strategy 2026-2030 in appendix 1, and the Plan on a Page Digital Strategy 2026-2030 in appendix 2.
2. Delegate authority to the Service Director Enabling and Head of Automation and Technology in consultation with the Portfolio holder for Transformation and Economic Growth to update the strategy annually aligned with any legislation change and best practice.

3. Background

1. Shropshire Council is operating in a context of increasing demand for services, significant financial pressure and rising expectations from residents for accessible, responsive and modern public services. The Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC) and Improvement Plan have identified the need for fundamental change in how services are delivered, including strengthening governance, improving efficiency and ensuring long term financial sustainability.
2. Digital transformation is a central enabler of this change. However, the Council's current operating model remains, in many areas, fragmented, process heavy and reactive. Residents are often required to navigate multiple systems, repeat information and access services at the point of escalation rather than earlier intervention, contributing to avoidable demand and increased cost to serve.
3. The Digital Strategy 2026–2030 has been developed to address these challenges and to establish a clear, structured approach to transformation. It is not a technology strategy, but a delivery strategy for how the Council will reduce demand, improve outcomes and achieve financial sustainability through the disciplined use of digital, data and automation.
4. The strategy is underpinned by a clear vision of “People Powered, Technology Driven”, recognising that transformation is not about technology alone but about improving lives, supporting staff and creating a more effective and sustainable organisation.
5. At its core, the strategy focuses on designing services around the needs of residents and communities, ensuring services are simple, accessible and inclusive, while maintaining strong support for those who are unable or unwilling to use digital channels. This includes a commitment to digital inclusion, ensuring that transformation reduces inequality rather than reinforcing it.

6. A key element of the strategy is the shift from reactive service delivery to a preventative, insight led model. This involves using data more effectively to anticipate need, support earlier intervention and reduce long term demand on services, particularly in high pressure areas such as health, care and safeguarding.
7. The strategy also recognises the need to modernise technology foundations. Many existing systems are legacy, fragmented and not designed to work together, creating duplication, inefficiency and increased risk. The strategy therefore prioritises the transition to modern, interoperable platforms that support integration, automation and more efficient service delivery.
8. Cyber security and resilience form a critical part of this approach. As reliance on digital systems increases, the Council must ensure that its services and data are protected, resilient and able to recover quickly from disruption. The strategy aligns closely with the Council's Cyber Security Strategy and the Cyber Assessment Framework, embedding security and resilience as fundamental design principles.
9. The effective use of data is also central to the strategy. Data will be treated as a strategic asset, with improved governance, ownership and quality enabling better decision making, performance management and service design. This supports the transition from retrospective reporting to proactive, insight driven services.
10. Delivering this level of transformation requires a step change in organisational capability. The strategy therefore includes a strong focus on building digital, data and technology skills across the workforce, with leaders accountable for outcomes and supported by multidisciplinary teams. Transformation will be delivered through services, rather than to services.
11. The strategy also sets out a structured approach to innovation, including the use of automation and artificial intelligence. These technologies will be applied in a controlled and ethical way, focused on delivering measurable outcomes such as improved efficiency, reduced cost to serve and better decision making, while maintaining transparency and public trust.
12. A further priority is strengthening partnership working across the Council's place-based system, including health, care and the voluntary sector. By improving data sharing and enabling more joined up services, the strategy supports a more integrated approach to meeting the needs of residents and communities.
13. The strategy is explicitly aligned to national policy, standards and best practice, including the Government Digital Service (GDS) Design Principles, the Technology Code of Practice, the Local Government Association digital frameworks, and the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT) direction for modern digital government. It also aligns with national cyber security expectations, including the Cyber Assessment Framework (CAF), ensuring that transformation is delivered in a secure, consistent and standards-based way.

14. Delivery of the strategy will be managed through a single, council wide digital portfolio, bringing together service redesign, technology, data, automation and cyber into a coherent governance model. This will ensure that activity is prioritised based on statutory risk, financial impact and demand reduction, and that duplication and fragmentation are reduced.
15. A strong emphasis is placed on benefits realisation and financial discipline. All initiatives will be required to define, track and evidence measurable benefits, including financial savings, improved outcomes and productivity gains. This ensures that digital investment is transparent, controlled and demonstrably delivering value.
16. Overall, the Digital Strategy provides a clear and coherent framework for how the Council will use digital, data and technology to respond to the challenges identified through the CPC and Improvement Plan. It establishes a structured, evidence led approach to transformation that is focused on reducing demand, improving outcomes and creating a more financially sustainable and resilient organisation for the future.

4. Summary of Main Proposals

1. Shropshire Council is at a critical point where rising demand, financial pressures and increasing expectations require a fundamental shift in how services are delivered. The Digital Strategy 2026–2030 provides a clear, coherent and disciplined approach to achieving this transformation, positioning digital, data and automation as core enablers of the Council's Improvement Plan and long-term sustainability.
2. The strategy sets out a practical, benefits led approach, with strong governance, prioritisation and accountability, ensuring that digital investment is focused on reducing demand, improving outcomes and delivering measurable financial and service benefits.
3. Approval of the strategy will establish a clear direction of travel for the Council, enabling a more efficient, resilient and user centred operating model. It will ensure that transformation is delivered in a consistent, controlled and evidence-based way, aligned to both local priorities and national best practice.
4. The strategy will operate on a four-year review cycle, with annual reviews to reflect legislative changes or organisational priorities.
5. Cabinet is therefore recommended to approve the Digital Strategy 2026–2030 and endorse its implementation as a key component of the Council's overall improvement and financial recovery programme.

5. Key risks and Opportunities

1. Demand reduction and prevention.
2. Greater use of digital, data and insight enables earlier intervention, reducing avoidable demand and improving outcomes for residents.
3. Improved financial sustainability.
4. A disciplined, benefits led approach to digital investment supports reductions in cost to serve and contributes to the Council's medium term financial recovery.
5. Improved service quality and accessibility.
6. User centred service design simplifies access, reduces complexity and improves overall experience for residents, members and staff.
7. Strengthened organisational resilience and cyber security.
8. Investment in secure, resilient technology foundations reduces risk of service disruption and protects critical systems and data.
9. Workforce productivity and capability.
10. Automation, modern tools and improved digital capability enable staff to focus on higher value activities and improve service efficiency.
11. Better use of data and insight.
12. Data driven decision making supports proactive service delivery, improving targeting of resources and outcomes across services.
13. Stronger partnership working.
14. Improved data sharing and integrated digital services support more joined up delivery across health, care and community partners.
15. The risks associated with delivery of the Digital Strategy are cross-cutting and align to multiple risks within the Council's Strategic Risk Register. They contribute to:
16. The risk of inability to contain overall expenditure within available resources, through dependency on digital transformation to reduce cost and demand
17. The risk of critical skills shortage impacting recruitment, retention and organisational capacity, reflecting the need to build digital capability across the workforce
18. The risk of failure to protect systems and data from cyber-attack, given the increasing reliance on digital systems for critical services
19. The risk of failure to adhere to governance arrangements, including data governance, decision-making and programme oversight

20. Wider risks relating to service access, inequality and demand management, particularly where services remain complex, fragmented or reactive
21. Delivery of this strategy therefore represents a key mitigating response to these corporate risks, rather than a standalone or isolated risk area.

Risk	Mitigation	Link to Strategic Risk
Failure to deliver planned transformation and benefits	Delivery through a single, prioritised digital portfolio with governance oversight and benefits tracking	Inability to contain overall committed expenditure within available resources
Insufficient adoption of new systems and ways of working	Structured change and adoption approach with training, engagement and monitoring	Critical skills shortage impacting on retention, recruitment and succession planning Inability to deliver organisational objectives / economic and service delivery outcomes
Cyber security incident or system failure	Secure-by-design approach aligned to CAF and strengthened resilience capabilities. Linked to Cyber Security Strategy 2026-2030.	Failure to protect from and manage the impact of a cyber-attack on ICT systems
Data quality or governance issues	Implementation of Data Quality Strategy and governance framework	Failure of officers and members to adhere to governance arrangements (including data governance and decision-making controls)
Digital exclusion impacting residents	Inclusive design and non-digital access routes	Impact of increased waiting lists / service access pressures (linked to capacity and equitable access to services)
Dependence on legacy systems and technical debt	Planned replacement with modern, interoperable platforms	Failure to protect from and manage the impact of a cyber-attack on ICT systems

		Inability to deliver organisational objectives / economic and service delivery outcomes
Fragmented delivery across services	Strong governance, design authority and standards	Failure of officers and members to adhere to governance arrangements (organisational alignment and decision-making)

6. Financial Implications

1. Shropshire Council continues to manage unprecedented financial demands and a financial emergency was declared by Cabinet on 10 September 2025. The overall financial position of the Council is set out in the monitoring position presented to Cabinet on a monthly basis. Significant management action has been instigated at all levels of the Council reducing spend to ensure the Council's financial survival. While all reports to Members provide the financial implications of decisions being taken, this may change as officers and/or Portfolio Holders review the overall financial situation and make decisions aligned to financial survivability. All non-essential spend will be stopped and all essential spend challenged. These actions may involve (this is not exhaustive):
 - scaling down initiatives,
 - changing the scope of activities,
 - delaying implementation of agreed plans, or
 - extending delivery timescales.
2. The Digital Strategy 2026–2030 is a critical enabler of the Council's financial sustainability and Medium-Term Financial Plan. It does not in itself commit the Council to new expenditure, it establishes the framework through which digital investment will be prioritised, governed and delivered.
3. All investment will be subject to separate business cases and approval processes in accordance with the Council's financial regulations and scheme of delegation. These will define expected financial and non-financial benefits, including reductions in cost to serve, demand reduction and improved productivity.
4. The strategy adopts a benefit led delivery model, with all savings and efficiencies baselined, tracked and validated through established governance arrangements. Only verified benefits will be reported, ensuring transparency and financial robustness.
5. Delivery of the strategy is expected to make a material contribution to the Council's medium term financial position by reducing demand, improving efficiency and supporting more sustainable service delivery.

7. Climate Change, Biodiversity and Environmental Implications

1. The Digital Strategy 2026–2030 supports the Council’s environmental sustainability objectives through more efficient and digitally enabled service delivery. This includes reducing reliance on paper-based processes, enabling remote access to services and supporting more flexible working arrangements, which may contribute to reduced travel and lower carbon emissions.
2. The strategy also includes a commitment to the ethical and sustainable use of technology, ensuring that digital solutions are designed and delivered with consideration of environmental impact.
3. The move towards modern, cloud-based platforms has the potential to improve energy efficiency by reducing reliance on on-premises infrastructure and making use of large scale, energy optimised data centres operated by technology providers. Many suppliers, including strategic partners, have established sustainability commitments, including carbon reduction and offsetting programmes.
4. As the primary focus of the strategy is service transformation rather than environmental change, impacts are expected to be indirect. Individual initiatives will be subject to appropriate appraisal, including environmental considerations where relevant, to ensure alignment with the Council’s wider climate change objectives.

8. Appendices

Appendix A – Digital Strategy 2026

Appendix B – 1 Page Digital Strategy 2026