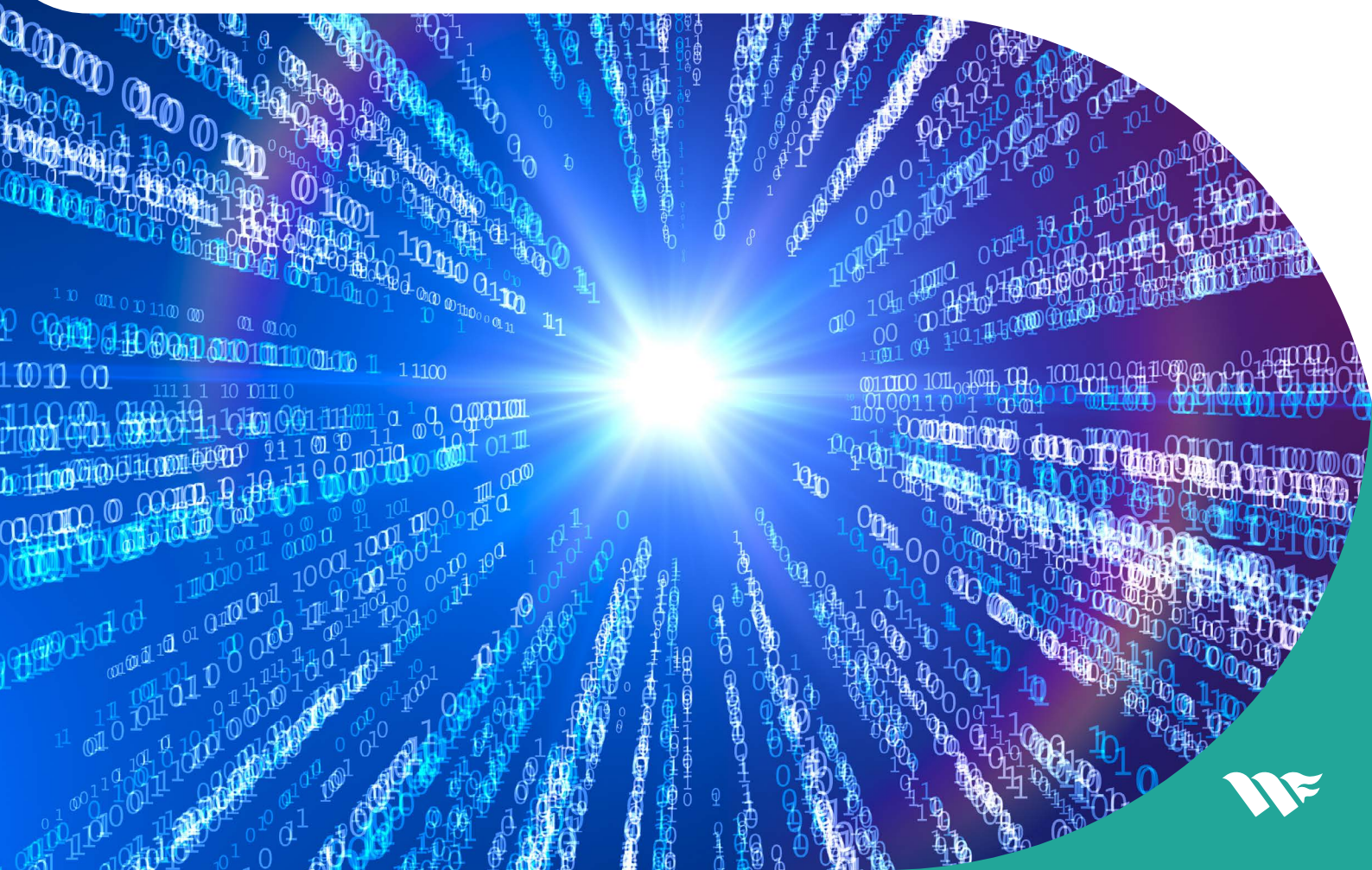




Westmorland
& Furness
Council

Our Digital Ambition – 2025 to 2028

To be a digitally enabled, innovative and inclusive council,
delivering the best possible services to all.



Foreword

We want to share with you our Digital Ambition for Westmorland and Furness.

This is an ambitious strategy to drive innovation in our organisation and deliver the best possible services for all our residents.

The Strategy aligns our digital initiatives with our Council objectives, using technology to enhance customer experience, streamline internal operations and to drive efficiencies.

This will complement our existing strategies across ICT, People, Customer Services, and Community Power.

We want to provide a high quality, easily accessible digital front door for our customers but this will not be the only channel available. Customers who don't feel comfortable using the digital channel will still be able to speak to us by phone or in person.

We will develop a digital mind-set and a culture of innovation, agility and continuous learning with new digital tools and solutions. The pace of change within technology is constant and we will strive to embrace new digital opportunities.

To create this strategy, we have engaged with services across the Council to understand what is important to deliver a digitally enabled Council along with other groups and customers to inform our approach. We would like to thank everyone who has contributed on the development of this programme.



Councillor Peter Thornton

Cabinet Member for Highways and ICT,
Westmorland and Furness Council



Sam Plum

Chief Executive,
Westmorland and Furness Council



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Introduction

The Digital Ambition will help shape the future of Westmorland and Furness Council through digital transformation.

Why is Digital Transformation important?

- The way people access services is evolving, and expectations are higher than ever including 24 x 7 access to Council services.
- Digital transformation is key to delivering modern, efficient, and accessible public services and to support the delivery of operational budget savings.
- Our ambition is to empower our residents, workforce, and communities through technology.

The Purpose of the Digital Ambition is to:

1. Provide a statement of our strategic intent and establish a roadmap to align our efforts with the Council Plans and strategic priorities.
2. Focus on creating real-world benefits for residents, businesses, and staff.
3. Help co-ordinate and drive forward activity to improve digital inclusion, community power, and service delivery across the council.



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Our Vision – A Digitally Enabled Future

Vision Statement:

“To make Westmorland and Furness a digitally enabled, innovative, and inclusive council, delivering the best possible services to all.”

The Digital Ambition is the cornerstone of our commitment to transforming the way services are delivered, ensuring they are **inclusive**, **accessible**, and **efficient**.

This ambition reflects the evolving needs of our residents, businesses, and workforce, embracing innovation to provide better outcomes for all.

This vision underpins Westmorland and Furness Council's broader strategies including:

- Council Plan
- Customer Strategy
- Data Strategy
- ICT Strategy
- Community Power.

It provides a clear direction for aligning digital transformation efforts with the needs of our communities.

Through our digital vision we will support a culture of innovation, agility and continuous learning with new digital tools and solutions.



Making our vision real

The Digital Ambition is a clear statement of intent and direction positioning digital innovation and transformation as a key enabler to achieving the Council Plan, Delivery Framework and Foundational Strategies including ICT, People, Customer Services, Data and Community Power.

Our Digital approach will support the Operating Model of the council and its financial sustainability. It will be embedded in the culture of the organisation and will support a data driven and user centric approach.

Realising the Digital Ambition for Westmorland and Furness Council requires a coordinated, collaborative approach.

We will transform our vision into action by addressing challenges, fostering partnerships, and leveraging technology to deliver measurable outcomes.

In today's digital-first world, customer and resident expectations are evolving rapidly. Convenience, personalisation, and seamless experiences are no longer optional — they are essential.

To illustrate the impact of this strategy, consider the journey of Ben and Heather who have just moved to the area. They both work and lead busy lives and only have the evenings and weekends available to sort out their bills and undertake the general administration needed to run their household. They have basic questions they want answered quickly and easily about whether they need planning permission to install solar panels on their roof; what the bin collection day is, and they want to check if they owe any council tax. Ben also needs to talk to someone about his mother as she is getting older and needs more help.

These are everyday tasks and challenges many residents face. And we recognise the frustration Ben and Heather will feel if they are not able to get answers for themselves in the evening or have to go through clunky processes and be handed from one team to another. This is not the experience the Council wants to provide and why our digital transformation journey is important so it can enhance Ben and Heather's experience.

Through a combination of an intuitive self-service portal, use of AI and support offered through telephony, face to face and digital channels, we see a future where Ben and Heathers' interactions with the council have been completely transformed.

Where they effortlessly find what they need, receive proactive reminders based on their preferences, and access support instantly through chat and automation.

Ben and Heather's story is just one example of how our digital strategy will reshape customer experiences. By leveraging technology, data, and innovation, we will create a future where interactions with the council will be smoother, smarter, and more satisfying.



David's Story: A More Efficient Way to Support Residents

David is a council tax officer at the local authority, responsible for processing payments, managing discounts and exemptions, and assisting residents with queries. In the past, much of his work was manual and time-consuming. Residents had to call or visit the office to update their details, request payment plans, or dispute charges. David often had to navigate multiple systems, search through paper records, and make numerous follow-up calls to resolve cases. This led to delays, frustration for both staff and residents, and a backlog of unresolved cases.

With the council's new digital strategy, David's role has been transformed. An integrated self-service portal now allows residents to update their details, apply for discounts, and set up payment plans online reducing the volume of inbound calls and visits. A new automated system flags overdue accounts and sends digital reminders, improving collection rates while reducing the need for manual follow-ups. AI-driven chatbots handle common queries instantly, freeing David and his team to focus on more complex cases that require human judgment.

Thanks to these digital improvements, David can now process cases faster, provide residents with real-time updates, and spend more time offering tailored support to those who need it most. The result is a more efficient, responsive, and customer-friendly service that benefits both the council and the community.



Key concepts underpinning the Strategy:

1. **Accessibility:** technology supporting inclusive access and usable services for all
2. **Innovation:** encouraging creative approaches to problem-solving through emerging technologies.
3. **Efficiency:** optimising resources to deliver value-driven public services. We will identify, quantify and drive out those savings.

Taking a Collaborative Approach

Achieving meaningful digital transformation relies on active participation and collaboration from key stakeholders.

- **The Workforce** - We will equip employees with the skills, tools, and confidence to embrace digital innovations in their daily work. Regular feedback loops will ensure staff remain central to shaping and improving our digital initiatives. We will ensure staff are supported through the digital changes within training, communication, and engagement.
- **Councillor and Senior Officer Leadership** - We will leverage the strategic oversight and influence of councillors and senior leaders to champion digital projects, align priorities with community needs, and drive accountability.
- **Community Involvement** - We will engage with residents, businesses, and local organisations to co-design services that are accessible, relevant, and impactful. Digital transformation must be inclusive, reflecting the diverse needs of our communities.

Addressing Challenges

To turn our vision into reality, we must proactively address key challenges that could hinder progress:

- **Digital Literacy** - We will take action to improve digital confidence across our key stakeholder groups through targeted training and awareness campaigns. This includes addressing gaps in digital skills for both staff, elected members and residents and supporting access to technology.
- **System Integration** - In line with our ICT Strategy and roadmap, we will replace fragmented and outdated systems with integrated, interoperable solutions that enable seamless collaboration across departments and services.
- **Data** - We will take action to ensure we have good quality data and make the most of the data available to us as this is the key foundation to the introduction of new technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI) and will enable evidence-based decision making.
- **Resource Constraints** - As an ambitious organisation, there are many competing priorities and this digital programme is one such demand on resourcing. We will identify and prioritise high-impact digital initiatives that maximise return on investment while seeking to secure external funding or partnerships to support implementation.

Where are we now?

We are well-positioned to build on our strengths and seize emerging opportunities. As a relatively new unitary council we are still consolidating the legacy approaches and systems of the four legacy councils. We are building on the best of what was in place prior to unitarisation and taking the opportunity to make changes where we know improvements can be made. By addressing current challenges, the council can lay the groundwork for a digitally enabled, inclusive future. Putting these foundations in place will then facilitate the subsequent phases of development for our Digital Ambition for Westmorland and Furness.

Strengths

- We have already begun our digital transformation journey, with notable achievements demonstrating the potential for broader success.
- Early wins from digital transformation such as our work on Artificial Intelligence readiness and the scoping for a Customer Relationship Management System for the organisation.
- Initial projects have shown tangible benefits, such as improved customer satisfaction, streamlined internal processes, and better use of digital tools to deliver services more effectively.
- Proactive stakeholder engagement: active participation from staff, communities, and councillors in digital initiatives has built a foundation of collaboration and trust.

Opportunities

- Harmonising Services Post-Council Unification: bringing together previously separate systems and processes provides an opportunity to create consistent and efficient service delivery.
- Leveraging Shared Data: unified data systems can provide actionable insights for targeted decision-making and improved resource allocation.
- Capitalising on Digital Trends: emerging technologies, such as Artificial Intelligence and automation, offer new avenues to optimise service delivery and improve the customer experience.



Insights from Workshops, Focus Groups, and Current Data

Our analysis draws on direct input from stakeholders and data-driven insights:

- **Workshops and Focus Groups:** feedback highlighted from our strategy development workshops the need for consistent communication, better system integration, and practical training to bridge skill gaps.
- **Current Data Review:** service metrics indicate uneven adoption of digital tools, with high performance in some areas and gaps in others.
- **User Experience Feedback:** residents and staff expressed a strong desire for intuitive, user-friendly systems that simplify processes and reduce manual effort.

Our Values

The Council's values are closely aligned with how a digitally focussed organisation operates. This will help us embed the concept of a digital first approach in the way we operate.



Ambitious – delivering the best experience for all Westmorland and Furness customers.



Inclusive – ensuring that everyone can access our services and taking action to remove barriers that get in the way of this happening.



Outcome focused - listening to our customers and communities to understand what they want to achieve to ensure their needs are met in the most effective way.



Collaborative - working across the whole Council with communities and partners to deliver joined up services to all.



Responsible – everyone taking responsibility for their role in ensuring a good digital experience and a culture of innovation across the organisation.



Needs led - focusing on our customers' needs when designing our digital services and interactions.



Ecologically aware - considering how the use of digital channels can support a reduction in the carbon footprint for Westmorland and Furness Council.

Underpinning Principles

A clear set of principles underpin our digital ambition, reflecting our commitment to building a digitally enabled Westmorland and Furness that prioritises the needs of our communities, staff, and partners.

These principles will guide every initiative within our Digital Ambition.

1. User-First Design

What it Means:

We place the needs and experiences of our residents, businesses, and staff at the heart of our digital initiatives. Services will be designed to be intuitive, accessible, and effective, ensuring every user can easily access the tools and support they need.

How We Deliver:

- Engage users in the design process to ensure services are responsive to their needs.
- Simplify processes and reduce unnecessary steps to improve the user experience.
- Provide tailored digital services that adapt to the diverse needs of our communities.

2. Technology as an Enabler

What it Means:

We recognise that technology is a tool to achieve our goals, not an end. Our focus is on how technology can improve outcomes, streamline operations, and enhance the overall quality of services.

How We Deliver:

- Prioritise solutions that solve real problems and deliver measurable benefits.
- Invest in scalable, future-proof technologies that align with our strategic vision.
- Ensure technology supports, not replaces, the personal touch that defines local government services.

3. Equitable Access and Inclusion

What it Means:

Westmorland and Furness Council is committed to ensuring no one is left behind in our digital transformation. We will promote inclusivity by addressing barriers to access and ensuring fairness across all channels.

How We Deliver:

- Provide alternative access methods for those unable to engage digitally.
- Implement tools and services that are accessible to people with disabilities.
- Bridge digital literacy gaps through targeted training and community support programmes.

4. Seamless Integration and Standardisation

What it Means:

We will create a unified digital ecosystem by connecting systems, data, and services, eliminating silos, and ensuring consistency across departments and touchpoints.

How We Deliver:

- Adopt interoperable solutions that integrate with existing infrastructure.
- Standardise processes and platforms to reduce complexity and duplication, linked to the ICT Strategy.
- Foster collaboration across teams to ensure consistent delivery and shared best practices.
- Sweat the assets of systems and solutions across the organisation.

5. Continuous Improvement

What it Means:

We will embed a culture of learning and adaptation, using data and feedback to refine and enhance our digital services over time, and focus our efforts on supporting productivity, efficient ways of working and value for money.

How We Deliver:

- Establish regular feedback loops with residents, staff, and partners adopting a Share, Learn and Improve approach.
- Use performance metrics and data insights to inform decision-making.
- Promote an iterative approach to project delivery, ensuring services evolve in response to changing needs.
- Have a clear focus on benefits realisation and efficiencies that can be achieved through digital ways of working.

By adhering to these design principles, Westmorland and Furness Council will ensure that our digital transformation is purposeful, inclusive, and impactful. These principles will act as a compass, guiding our decisions and actions as we strive to meet the evolving needs of our communities.

How we will get there

Our journey to realise the Digital Ambition is built upon four strategic pillars. These pillars outline the focus areas that will drive transformation, foster innovation, and deliver tangible outcomes for our residents, workforce, and communities.

Through these strategic pillars, Westmorland and Furness will build a digitally enabled future that balances robust infrastructure, innovative services, a skilled workforce, and empowered communities. Together, these pillars ensure we achieve meaningful and sustainable transformation.

1. Digital Foundations

What this means:

Working across services we will strengthen our digital infrastructure, governance frameworks, and cyber resilience to create a strong foundation for all digital initiatives. A reliable and secure base is critical for supporting innovative solutions and ensuring operational continuity.

Key Actions – we will:

- Upgrade and modernise ICT systems and infrastructure to meet current and future needs.
- Implement robust cybersecurity measures to protect council and citizen data.
- Establish governance structures that ensure accountability and alignment across digital projects.

Why It Matters:

A strong foundation ensures we can deliver services efficiently, mitigate risks, and adapt to changing technological landscapes.

2. Digital Services

What this means:

Enhancing the accessibility, usability, and efficiency of our digital services to better meet the needs of residents and staff. We aim to provide seamless and intuitive interactions across all channels.

Key Actions – we will:

- Transition services to user-friendly digital platforms that cater for diverse needs.
- Adopt self-service portals to empower users and streamline service delivery.
- Ensure accessibility standards are met to provide equitable service for all residents.

Why It Matters:

Delivering user-centric digital services improves satisfaction, reduces costs, and makes council services more efficient and accessible.

3. Collaboration and Culture

What this means:

Building a digital-first mindset across the council by fostering collaboration among staff, councillors, and communities. Change starts with people, and embedding a culture of innovation is key to sustained success.

Key Actions – we will:

- Provide digital upskilling and training programmes for staff and councillors.
- Encourage cross-department collaboration to share insights and best practices.
- Recognise and celebrate digital ambassadors who champion transformation efforts.

Why It Matters:

A culture of collaboration and innovation enables the council to adapt to challenges and seize opportunities effectively.

4. Community Power and Impact

What this means:

Engaging citizens as active participants in the digital journey while addressing barriers to digital access. By fostering community power, we ensure everyone benefits from digital advancements.

Key Actions – we will:

- Contribute towards minimising the digital divide by supporting access to tools, training and resources for those that need it.
- Leverage citizen feedback to co-create digital services that reflect community needs.
- Promote digital inclusion through public initiatives like community hubs and workshops.

Why It Matters:

Harnessing the power of engaged and excited citizens not only bridges inequalities but also strengthens trust and participation in council services.

Policy and Good Governance

Policy and good governance are the backbone of Westmorland and Furness Council's digital transformation.

These policies will focus on ethical, secure, and fair usage, ensuring compliance with legal and societal expectations.

By creating Artificial Intelligence (AI) governance frameworks and adhering to data protection and privacy standards, the council will build trust among residents.

Regular audits will further ensure that AI systems and data practices remain transparent, accountable, and in line with best practices.

To maintain accountability and alignment, robust governance structures will oversee all digital transformation projects. Clear roles and responsibilities will be established across all digital initiatives, supported by regular reporting and evaluation mechanisms. These actions will ensure that resources are efficiently allocated, duplication is avoided, and outcomes are consistently aligned with organisational priorities.

Key to delivering these strategic outcomes are our people, technology, processes, governance, and approach to data.





Sustainability

We will ensure our digital initiatives are managed responsibly and align with our broader commitment to social, economic, and environmental sustainability.

Environmental sustainability is a central consideration of our digital operations. Through energy-efficient IT infrastructure, sustainable procurement practices, and cloud-based solutions, the council will reduce its ecological footprint.

Digital-first approaches will also minimise paper usage and reduce the need for travel, further contributing to our climate goals. By integrating sustainability into digital practices, we align our efforts with broader commitments to combating climate change and achieving a greener future.

What we will need to get there

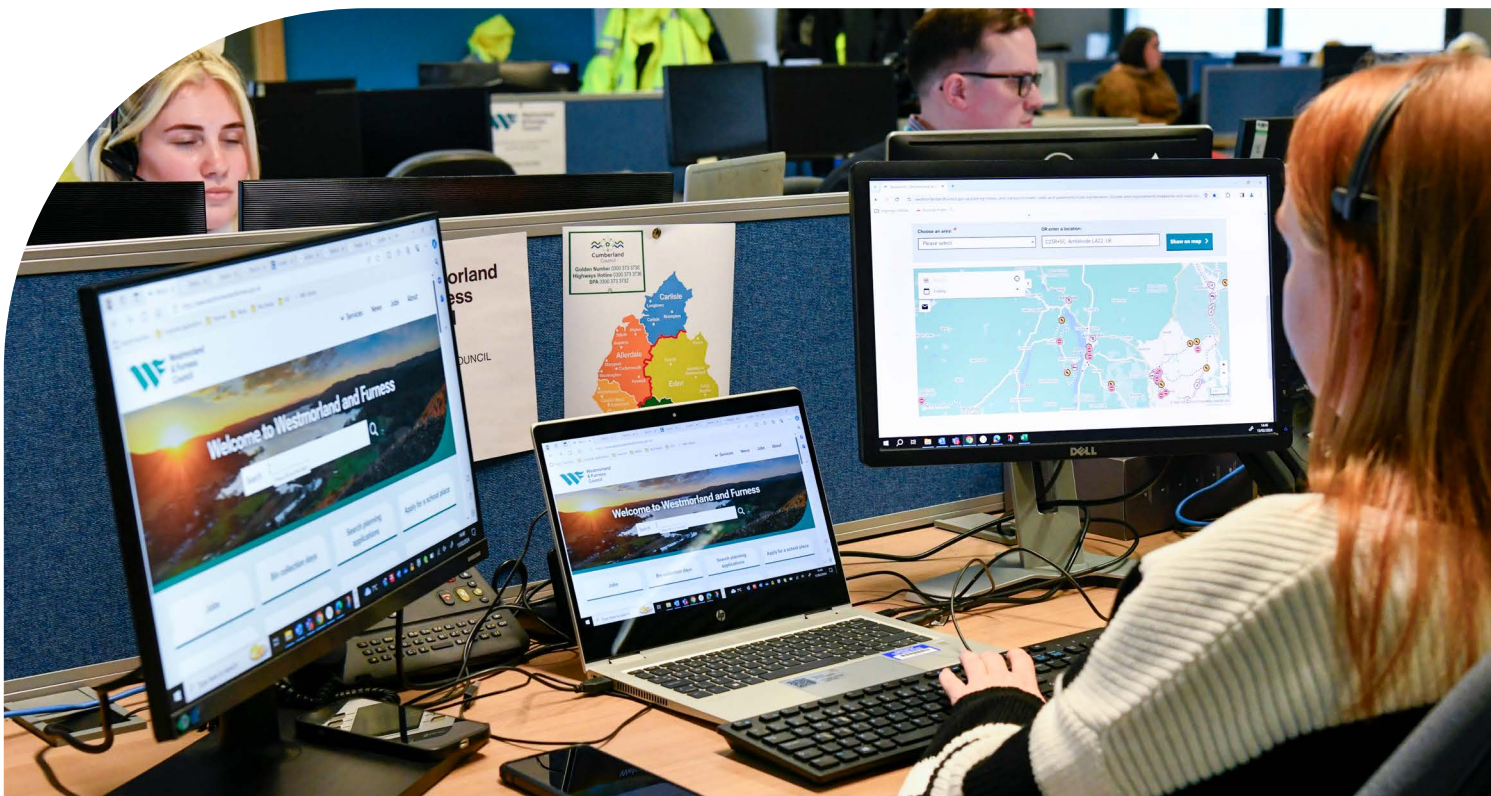
- We will put customer at the heart of the programme – we will need to flex our approaches to different internal and external user cohorts. The voice of the customer will be key to our solution design.
- There is a high level of interdependencies – impact of these cannot be underestimated and need to be understood. We will be working closely with our key foundational teams such as ICT, People and Data to ensure a co-ordinated approach to our digital programme.
- We will require organisational buy in to the corporate operating model and design principles.
- We will require investment – in capacity, in skills, in expertise and access to the necessary tools to deliver our ambition.
- We will ensure alignment to wider priorities to ensure realistic delivery for the Digital Ambition.

How will we know if we have been successful?

We will have a suite of indicators to measure our success, and baselining will be undertaken to measure against the indicators.

The key areas of focus will be to achieve:

- An increase in digital adoption and customer self-service
- Improved customer satisfaction
- Reduced operational costs through digital efficiencies.
- Improved staff and councillor confidence in digital tools
- Availability of digital literacy support and skills to our residents
- Enhanced integration across Council systems.
- Increased digital channel shift and reduction in call volumes.



Appendix 1: Digital Ambition Delivery Plan 2025 - 2026 (Year 1)

This 2025/26 delivery plan provides a high-level overview of the work, which will take place over the coming year on the context of the Digital Ambition for Westmorland and Furness Council from 2025 to 2028..

It is structured around 3 key outcomes:

1. **Accessibility:** technology supporting inclusive access and usable services for all
2. **Innovation:** creative approaches to problem solving are adopted through the use of emerging technologies
3. **Efficiency:** resources are optimised to deliver value-driven public services

Outcome	Key Deliverables	Target Delivery Date	Measures of Success
Accessibility	<p>Consolidate and redesign our websites, making them clearer and more accessible.</p> <p>Introduce consistent, mobile-first design patterns, iterating based on our users' needs.</p> <p>Review any underused content and redesign our content around resident need and accessibility.</p>	March 2026	<p>Improved Website Accessibility: (WCAG)</p> <p>Increased customer satisfaction</p> <p>Consolidation of legacy websites</p>
Accessibility	Develop a consolidated programme of digital inclusion activities to support those customers who do not have access to devices or data	March 2026	Introduction of framework and approach for digital inclusion activities with customers
Accessibility	Continue to proactively engage with Connecting Cumbria to ensure digital infrastructure programme complements the Digital Ambition Delivery Plan	March 2026	Advocate that digital infrastructure is in place to enable connectivity and infrastructure to support the Digital Ambition Programme

Outcome	Key Deliverables	Target Delivery Date	Measures of Success
Innovation	Design an assistive technology care strategy to help our more vulnerable and older residents achieve the best possible quality of life	March 2026	Develop a roadmap of innovative technology solutions that can support technology enabled care for our customers
Innovation	Explore introduction of embedded Artificial Intelligence (AI) for line of business applications, where appropriate	September 2025	Agreed governance approach for introduction of embedded AI. Clear costs/benefit approach for introduction of AI Operational savings realised through introduction of AI
Innovation	Explore the introduction of new technologies such as Artificial Intelligence solutions that support corporate functions including minute taking	September 2025	Develop roadmap for innovative technologies, which will iterate, to support developments with corporate functions
Innovation	Explore further use of Internet of Things (IoT) to support improved accessibility and improved connectivity	March 2026	Develop roadmap including opportunities for assistive technologies and smart home devices
Innovation	Explore continued development of Microsoft suite of solutions to maximise benefit across the organisation	March 2026	Develop roadmap and training programme of opportunities through Microsoft suite of solutions
Efficiency	Build a range of new digital services in a data-driven priority order with focus on high-volume services and current manual heavy processes	March 2026	Reduced officer time for business areas spend on back-office processing, through service re-design, systems integration and automation
Efficiency	Support the Council Annual Plan to deliver a series of service-by-service transformation programmes enabled by digital technology and improve customer transactions	March 2026	Reduced customer complaints as services are redesigned to be easier to use

Outcome	Key Deliverables	Target Delivery Date	Measures of Success
Efficiency	Explore different technologies for communication for customer services including assisted chat functionality	March 2026	Reduced spend on customer service activity across the Council by reducing demand both over the phone and face to face
Efficiency	Integrate social media communications for Customer Services within our Customer Relationship Management System and Digital Platform	March 2026	Reduced spend on customer service activity across the Council by reducing demand both over the phone and face to face and manual entry of customer data
Efficiency	Working with ICT, develop a clear vision for all council technology systems, working towards a reduced corporate portfolio, supported by shared components that provide common functions once, integrated through APIs	March 2026	Reduced operational costs through contract rationalisation
Efficiency	Deliver an ongoing portfolio of improvements to council systems to ensure seamless process and removal of paper-based council processes, prioritised on a clear roadmap	March 2026	Reduced paper usage, helping to meet the Council's climate agenda
Efficiency	Aligned to the People Plan ensure our workforce are supported through the digital transformation programme	June 2026	Digital upskilling across the organisation and digital mindset embedded Introduce Digital Champion Programme in partnership with Organisation Development and Workforce Training
Efficiency	Develop a single Customer Relationship Management System for the whole council including a customer account function which gives customer one version of the truth for customer transactions	Rolling programme of onboarding	Reduced failure demand across the organisation



Westmorland
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Translation Services

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للوصول إلى هذه المعلومات بلغتك، يرجى الاتصال

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