

# ICT STRATEGY

2020–2025

BUILDING FOR CHANGE

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# ICT strategy 2020–2025

## Building for Change

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# Foreword

This document sets out how, over the next five years, Basildon Council will develop its use of information, communications and technology (ICT) to support simpler, smarter and safer services for all our residents and customers.

It underpins all the ambitions we have agreed in our Digital and Customer strategies. Modernising our ICT by updating the systems we use, streamlining them and making better use of their potential is absolutely vital if we are to meet the developing demands of our residents and customers.

Two years ago we set out ambitious plans to make the council fully digital by 2025. The sweet spot we are aiming at is to provide online services that people will choose to use because they are easier and more convenient and they have confidence they are secure, that at the same time means we reduce our costs freeing up funds for other vital services. Modern, efficient ICT is a fundamental building block to achieve this.

This document ultimately helps define the shape of the vehicle this council is, but it necessarily deals with what's under bonnet. That level of detail is not for everyone – most of us just want to enjoy a comfortable and convenient journey. We have tried to include as much detail as we need to, but focus as much as we can on the principles of ICT development and its outcomes. In particular, this document outlines an overall platform approach.

Bright, shiny ICT is not an end in itself, it needs to deliver council services that offer choice, transparency, trust and value. The success of this strategy will be determined by our residents and customers – will they be satisfied that they can access our services in the ways they want, when they want to, using the devices of their choosing, confident that we are managing their information safely and securely and using public money wisely.

These are big tests. To pass them we must constantly challenge ourselves so that we use technology to best enable new ways of working for our staff and support continual improvement and innovation in services to our customers.

Councillor Gavin Callaghan, Leader of Basildon Council

Mandie Skeat, Service Director and Chair, Customer and Digital Board

## Building for change

“ICT only exists to enable the delivery of effective, efficient and well-governed services.”

This fundamental principle underpins all of the council's customer and digital programme, including this ICT Strategy.

Our ICT strategic delivery is founded on four pillars ...

## 1. Focus on the basics

Customers and staff at the council rely on our fundamental information

**Co-create innovative digital solutions**

**Embed enduring digital capability**

**Leverage relevant technology advances**

**Focus on the basics**

systems and technology every day. We cannot get off the starting line on our digital journey if these systems do not work and continue to work. We have migrated our technical operations and help desk to an external managed services specialist. The council can continue to expect secure, reliable, compliant and accessible services.

We can now shift our focus towards the future without compromising fundamental operations nor being continually distracted by basic day-to-day service management.

## 2. Embed enduring digital capability

Over time our ICT infrastructure has become too complex. We have too many systems that don't talk to each other well, or at all and require different levels of support. It is a result of technological limitations and, at times, own pragmatic judgement to fix problems as they arise, without overall planning and control.

We will break this unproductive cycle with the aid of new technologies and a new mindset. To start, we will avoid stand-alone projects. Instead we will bundle common functions into reusable service platforms.

A platform approach enables fast, economic delivery of maintainable business solutions. This strategy implies a more architectural and principle-driven approach to solution design.

We envisage core platforms that support customer access on a number of channels, document and content management, voice and team collaboration, data sharing plus a consistent approach to business process automation.

At the same time we intend to simplify and rationalise our array of applications and vendors.

### 3. Leverage relevant advances in technology

We will take a managed, risk-based approach to new technologies.

While early adoption of new technologies can offer operational and cost benefits, it also introduces risk. We aim to introduce new capabilities at the right time – early enough to enjoy lifecycle benefits but late enough to limit our risk. This will be a matter of ongoing good judgement on the behalf of all stakeholders.

For example, cloud hosted solutions are approaching a level of maturity and acceptance. Cloud now seems a logical, future hosting strategy for the council.

We will consider other promising technologies that may align well with our business and customer expectations. We will measure them by their potential effect on council customer services and the total lifetime cost of ownership.

ICT is currently researching a few potentially beneficial technologies such as in-cab computing, natural language document indexing and new Geographical Information System (GIS) data sets.

### 4. Co-create innovative digital solutions

The economics of information systems has shifted. Monolithic software applications no longer deliver savings through economies of scale. In fact, they inhibit the integration and cross-functional working expected by our customers.

Previously, individual council services would choose and buy applications suited to their needs, then ask the ICT service to host and manage these applications. Since traditional applications are expensive to change, the business then adapted their operational processes to fit the software.

Quite rightly, the business now expects the reverse. Software that is easily adapted to their specific and optimal business process requirements.

Modern technology fortunately enables this shift. But this also requires a new partnership approach to solutions design and development. We call this agile co-creation. ICT, customers and the business working together to deliver new business solutions, all equally invested in the outcome.

The result is that customers will enjoy well-aligned, innovative, cost-effective and timely services.

# ICT strategy: key principles

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We aim to find evidence-based solutions to business challenges that are proven to meet customer demand.

Over time we will optimise our defined set of customer communication channels guided by ease of customer access and council responsiveness, all delivered at the right price.

Both customer and internal service processes shall be standardised, thoughtfully designed, documented, kept current and monitored in operation.

We encourage channel-shift away from voice to a range of digital channels. We will settle upon a limited number of useful, economic customer access channels and technologies.

Customers will see a single point of access to all council services and will be able to access it using a channel of their choosing.

Business process designs and operational data are considered council assets and will be developed, maintained and secured in line with other assets.

All operational processes will be as lean as possible, well documented and where appropriate, highly automated.

We will develop among our own staff the capability for business analysis and digital solution design. Nobody knows our business better than we do.

Effective support for a digitally enabled, mobile workforce is a priority.

Council-wide data assets must be consistent, simplified, secure and readily available to authorised customers and staff.

We intend to both refine and extend our investment in Microsoft architecture. This architecture and set of software products serves a council of our scale effectively and economically.

While more capable than ever, information technology is also more complex. We will therefore seek and maintain partnerships with external and internal specialists that can help us balance make-versus-buy decisions. ICT will convene and lead this collaborative decision process.

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Where it makes sense we will prefer to work with local technology companies and educational institutions and offer ICT internships to local students.

Any significant programme of change will force any organisation out of its comfort zone, exposing unforeseen issues and conflicting principles. Senior management must be appropriately engaged, helping the transformation team make sense of these issues, determining the new policy or approach and actively advocating the agreed change.

Information systems architecture is now a well-established discipline. It aims to introduce cost-effective patterns and principles into any new solution. The ICT team will continue to collect, document, manage and enforce good architectural practice, potentially aided by suitable tooling.

As the transformation programme expands, ICT in conjunction with the Digital Team, will capture and document effective methods of change we wish to preserve and repeat. Appropriate adoption of formal methods will be the responsibility of all stakeholders at all levels of the council.

As we change we will ensure we retain flexibility and business agility by avoiding or limiting long-term technology contracts or designs.

ICT will encourage and enable the capability of our staff to directly configure more modern technology in response to their changing business demands.

We must not be afraid to make mistakes or throw away early stage solution development work. ICT expect to lead in experimentation, innovation and iterative solution development.

Any externally sourced software, commercial or open source, must align with our ICT architecture, support our service levels and operate in harmony with the platform strategy.



# Key ICT initiatives

## Application modernisation

A number of directorates are in need of major application upgrades or replacement. In particular, waste services, housing, finance, planning, revenue and benefits plus legal have all voiced the case for significant software application and business process change.

It may make commercial sense for these groups to acquire a package solution or develop their own automated processes. Either way, the solutions must conform to our stated ICT principles, architecture and total cost of ownership criteria.

While each of these initiatives appear to stand alone, functionally aligned to different departments, ICT sees a significant degree of commonality.

Each solution requires efficient customer access, conforming document management, staff collaboration, process automation and data integration. In short, they each rely upon our proposed platform services”

So any application modernisation project offers the opportunity to further realise our integrated ICT platform vision, while sharing costs, avoiding technical debt and creating a simpler solution to maintain.

And it's not just the technical platforms where savings and efficiencies emerge. While each of these solution areas is yet to be justified in detail and, at their core, require quite different business functionality, we can develop and apply repeatable methods. These methods would be developed and used by the core Digital Team to design new service processes, specify requirements and acquire software that support the ICT Strategy and in the end, implement new, cost effective ways of working.

## End-user device refresh

As a matter of priority the ICT Group will begin procurement, setup and deployment of the newest devices for most of our staff.

Following the requirements for more mobility, most of these devices will be Windows 10 laptops with tablet computers where required by certain field roles. The deployment shall deliver new Office 365 tools to all staff

In conjunction with this council-wide equipment upgrade, we will migrate and re-index all our long-term managed storage to SharePoint 365. Personal file storage will be provided by OneDrive.

Office 365, SharePoint 365 and OneDrive are all cloud-based to minimise maintenance, while better enabling new ways of working and information sharing.

The ICT Team will provide or coordinate additional, dedicated project management and technical support for our new users. Process and application training will be provided by the respective business group.

Final requirements and procurement arrangements will be decided by April 2020, followed by a limited pilot roll-out during April and May 2020. We will roll out all new devices, with the new standard software suite, with a phased approach from June 2020 to December 2020.

## The Digital Team

Digital transformation is definitely a long-term programme of change and can perhaps be considered as an important, permanent competency. The establishment of a core Digital Team with the right people, skills, knowledge, methods and tools is fundamental to the success of our transformation. This team should be able to engage and support both the ICT Group and the business on the journey into our digital future.

We will be changing the way we work, revising how customers access our services, integrating new software and technology while intelligently automating more of our operations. This is a bold initiative and we must be smart in our approach.

Forming a permanent digital team enables the council to accelerate our efforts. An enduring team can retain important knowledge and learnings from one initiative to another, offering an improved, integrated approach to change

In turn, this knowledge will inform the creation of reusable methods for digital transformation that are well suited to our management style and business needs.

Despite the diversity of digital demands in the council, most initiatives have a lot in common. This commonality can be documented in suitable transformation tools to support continuous improvement and avoid errors or rework. We envisage tools that support business and technical architecture design, process design, requirements management and various technical methods of rapid deployment.

Formation and enablement of the Digital Team is a priority for the first half of 2020.

## Customer access platform

Customers expect to initiate and manage their access to council services in ways that best suit them. This may include voice, paper mail, email, SMS text messaging, walk-ins, web forms, surveys, council customer portal and social networks like twitter and Facebook.

Regardless of the channel selected by the customer, the council service remains fundamentally the same. The only difference is in how we interact, using the customers' current choice of one or more channels.

The council can secure significant benefits by consolidating customer access functionality into a single technology platform, a customer access platform.

Customer requests will be directed in a timely manner to the most appropriate person or automation. Multiple service requests and associated customer data can be consolidated or coordinated intelligently, as the customer would expect, when dealing with a single organisation. We expect to develop a single view of each customer across the various independent application data sets.

Better still, the customer experience can be personalised, as if they were dealing with a single expert, well-versed in the specific customer matter at hand. This ambition must hold true, even if some or all of the work is automated.

In time we also expect chatbots, built upon Artificial Intelligence (AI), to offer excellent self-service capabilities. Chatbots, are then potentially, a key component of the single, council-wide customer access platform.

By its nature, any undertaking to design and consolidate functionality into a single set of services can get complex. We will look to share the technical and commercial risk of developing and configuring the customer access platform with suitable IT industry experts.

## Business process automation platform

Analysis of the council's operations shows we conduct work ranging from quite repetitive, transactional customer service work to ad-hoc, project oriented work. The data we use to support this work also ranges from structured information in forms and spreadsheets to unstructured data such as free text, video and voice. This unstructured data has, to date, been difficult to manage or automate.

We envisage much of the more transactional work that uses structured data can be automated using the Microsoft Dynamics 365 software. There exists a rich ecosystem of related components to support automation using this technology and Microsoft Dynamics 365 will therefore become our primary business process automation platform.

## Collaboration platform

Not all work is neatly predictable or based upon well understood data or crisp business rules. People need to be involved and direct the work in an intelligent manner. This case management style of working invariably involves active communication with others.

To facilitate and co-ordinate such semi-structured, knowledge work the council plans to upgrade our Microsoft Skype telephony and messaging software to Microsoft Teams.

Teams is a modern platform that supports voice and video calls, screen sharing, chat, private and public teamwork, case file storage, a teamwork library (like Wikipedia), online meetings plus a long list of add-on components to extend our business functionality and facilitate smarter ways of working.

While Teams can contribute to efficiency in our case management work it also offers the ability to deliver on-the-job training with instructional videos, document collaboration, report distribution, project management coordination, customer surveys, document signing and approvals, plus a whole lot more.

We expect to conduct foundational work for Teams and initiate a pilot by mid-2020 with a view to corporate rollout by 2021.

# Timeline

