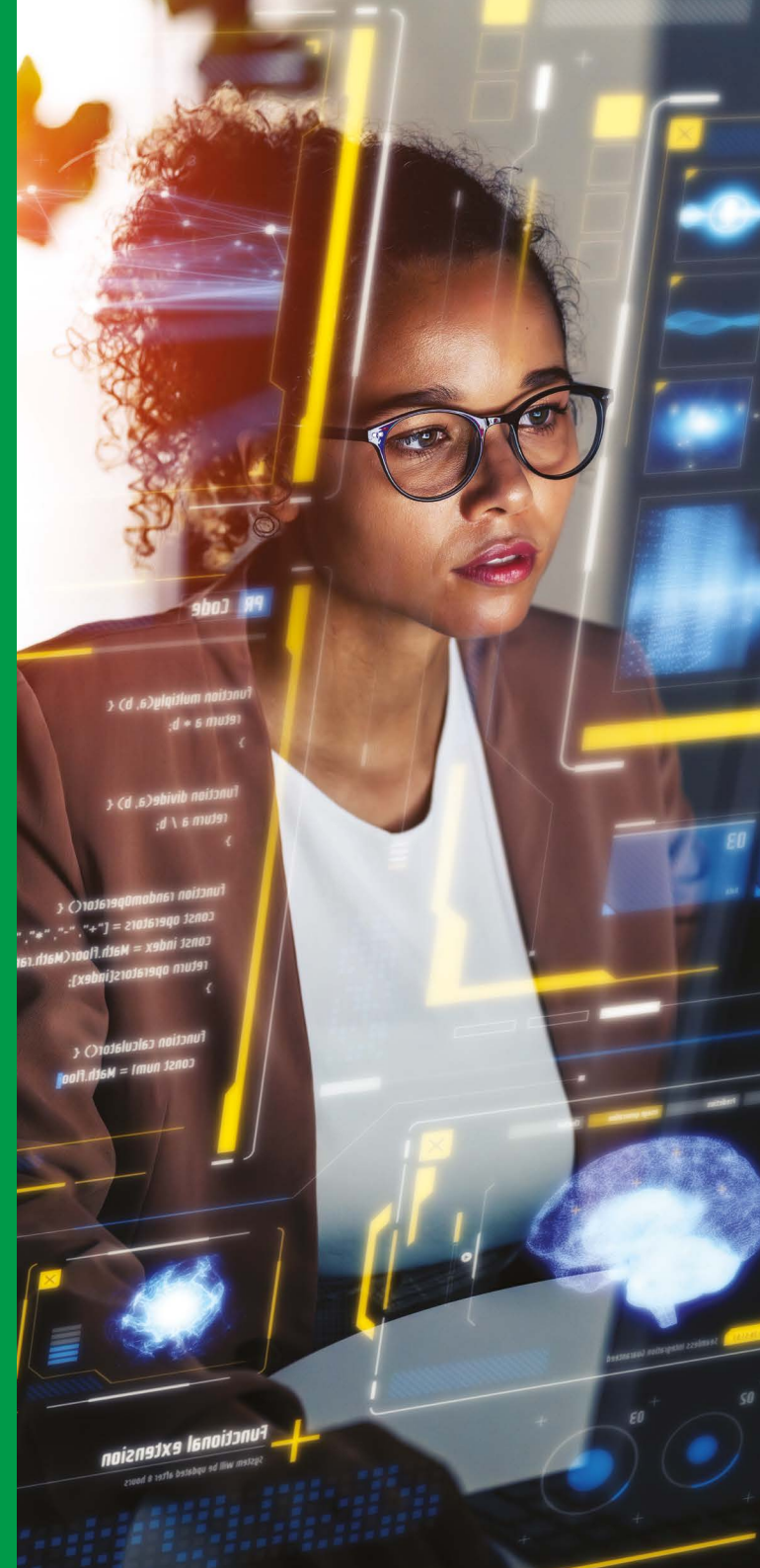


Digital Strategy 2025-28

Harnessing digital technology to make
Stevenage even better for everyone.



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1. Foreword

In December 2025, Stevenage Borough Council launches its Digital Strategy for 2025–2028, a blueprint for harnessing technology to make Stevenage even better for everyone. This strategy has been shaped by our Making Stevenage Even Better Corporate Plan for 2024–2027, national digital frameworks, and informed by feedback and insight from our residents, staff, and partners.

Digital transformation is at the heart of our ambition to deliver efficient, inclusive, and customer-focused services. We are committed to making every interaction with the Council simple, intuitive, and accessible—whether online or in person. Our digital improvements will help residents access services quickly and easily, support staff with better tools and training, and ensure our organisation is agile and ready for the future. We recognise that there will always be vulnerable customers whose needs cannot be fully met through digital channels, and by digitising services for the majority, we can free up capacity to support those who most need it.

This strategy comes at a pivotal time, as local government faces new opportunities and challenges. With the Government's plans for local government reform, Stevenage is determined to be “fighting fit”—ready to adapt, collaborate, and lead in a changing landscape. Our strong partnerships position us to shape the future of public service delivery, both locally and regionally.

We are investing in digital solutions that drive efficiency, improve our website, and encourage the use of online services. From self-service and automation to AI-powered chatbots and intelligent telephony, we are embracing innovation to make life easier for our residents and businesses. At the same time, we are committed to digital inclusion, ensuring that everyone in Stevenage can benefit from new technologies, regardless of background or ability.

Our approach is collaborative and evidence-based. We listen to feedback, pilot new ideas, and refine our services to meet real needs. By working together—across teams, with partners, and with our community—we will deliver digital services that are robust, secure, and future-ready.

Successful implementation of this strategy will mean better outcomes for everyone: improved customer experience, greater efficiency, and a digitally skilled workforce. Every digital project will be measured against our commitment to value for money, transparency, and supporting the residents, communities, and businesses of Stevenage.

I am proud to present this strategy as a testament to our Council's dedication to innovation, inclusion, and continuous improvement. Together, we will build a digital future that works for all.

Councillor Jeanette Thomas
*Deputy Leader of the Council - Cabinet Member
- Resources and Performance*



The new Digital Strategy applies Council wide and is aligned with the Making Stevenage Even Better (MSEB) Corporate Plan, as well as national plans.

2. Strategic Context

MSEB Corporate Plan

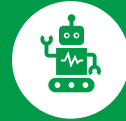


Priority - Balancing the Budget
Making service delivery more efficient

Alignment to national plans



LGA Local Government Digitalisation Framework
Digitally delivering inclusive services



DSIT Blueprint for Modern Digital Government
Harnessing AI and prepare for GOV.UK One Login



DSIT Digital Inclusion Action Plan: First Steps
Making sure everyone is included in our digital world

3. Vision

Stevenage Borough Council's digital strategy aims to enhance customer experience, improve efficiency, and use technology to drive innovation and inclusivity. The strategy prioritises customer-focused service delivery with simple, intuitive interactions and first-contact resolution. Online services should be designed to be accessible and efficient, making them the preferred choice for residents.

The vision is shaped by clear evidence of resident needs and preferences. The latest Residents Survey shows 48% of people prefer to use the website for Council information, yet two-thirds aren't signed up for a customer account. Council housing repairs are the most common reason for phone contact, but online reporting is underused, ranking only around 40th in website visits. These insights highlight real opportunities to increase digital engagement, improve access to services 24/7, and focus staff time on supporting those with more complex needs.

Digital improvements also play a vital role in supporting staff and internal operations. By streamlining workflows, reducing manual tasks, and improving system integration, the strategy enables teams to work more efficiently and focus on delivering high-quality services. Staff benefit from better tools, clearer processes, and enhanced digital skills—creating a more agile and empowered workforce.

A key aspect of the strategy is boosting digital efficiency through self-service, automation, and workflow optimisation. The Council is committed to assessing workforce digital proficiency, addressing skill gaps through training and recruitment, and helping staff adapt confidently to new technologies. Investing in staff capabilities is essential to achieving digital success and sustaining service excellence.

It is also recognised there will always be a need for a physical and human interface with residents that are not digitally enabled, and the Council is committed to ensuring accessibility for all.



4. Local Government Reorganisation and Government Strategy

This strategy also prepares the Council to be fighting fit for Local Government Reform. Following the Government's December 2024 white paper on local government devolution, there is uncertainty around the future shape of public services—but also a significant opportunity to rethink and redesign how digital services are delivered. Stevenage aims to be at the forefront of this transformation, collaborating with neighbouring authorities and contributing to regional thinking on organisational design and digital planning. As this is a three-year strategy, it may cover part of the period during which a shadow authority or new local authority is established.

By delivering digital services through its in-house team, the Council is well positioned to navigate the complexities of reorganisation. Relationships with the Local Government Association, Local Digital, and other authorities will support digital change at a crucial time.

Ultimately, the focus for digital is on building a digitally skilled workforce and delivering efficient, high-quality, and inclusive services—internally and externally—while ensuring the Council is ready to lead and adapt in a changing local government landscape.

As digital technologies evolve, the digital strategy will be kept adaptable by tracking trends in AI, digital identity, and IoT, supporting this with pilots and sector engagement. Working with councils, engaging in sector initiatives, and following guidance from the Local Digital team, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), Government Digital Services (GDS), and Local Government Association (LGA) helps ensure alignment with national priorities and established practices. Relevant strategies include the Blueprint for Modern Digital Government (A blueprint for modern digital government (HTML) - GOV.UK) and the Digital Inclusion Action Plan (Government Digital Inclusion Strategy - GOV.UK).



Develop Digital Solutions



Improve the Website and Intranet



Adopt AI



Drive use of Digital Services

5. Priorities

1. **Develop Digital Solutions:** maximising the ability to utilise self-service, automation, and case management to be more efficient and provide customers with modern services, using business cases for further investment in new technology where necessary
2. **Improve the Website and Intranet** reflecting the need to constantly modernise and build engagement to meet customer expectation
3. **Adopt AI:** to drive efficiency and deliver smarter, modern services that genuinely improve outcomes for residents and staff
4. **Drive use of Digital Services:** encourage use of online services through nudge messages, updating letters and other communications, triage approaches, and further promotion.



6. Digital Delivery

Digital delivery within Stevenage Borough Council is built on collaboration, clarity, and purpose. Projects are delivered through a unified approach that brings together the Digital Team, IT, frontline services, and strategic suppliers. This ensures that every solution is designed for operational reality, technical resilience, and measurable customer value.

Governance and prioritisation are overseen by the Business Change and Digital Board, ensuring that resources are directed toward initiatives which best support corporate priorities and deliver tangible benefits for residents and staff. This approach maintains transparency, accountability, and a clear connection between digital activity and organisational outcomes.

Delivering digital improvement is a shared effort. Some changes are driven directly by the team, and others are delivered as part of wider improvement plans. The expertise of specialists and partners is harnessed where needed, ensuring the Council can respond to the wider environment and evolving context. By combining what can be delivered internally with what can be commissioned, impact is maximised and this ensures that digital services remain robust, innovative, and fit for the future.

Opportunities to pursue grant funding and

discounted pilots to try new technologies will be explored as they become available.

Delivery is grounded in agile and pragmatic methods. Work is delivered in small, focused increments that provide early value while allowing flexibility as needs evolve. Innovation and experimentation are encouraged, balanced with a practical focus on sustainability, security, and proportionality to the Council's capacity.

Customer experience remains central to digital development. Insight gathered from online analytics, surveys, and contact centre feedback informs the continuous improvement of services. A "test, learn, refine" approach is applied, enabling controlled pilots of new ideas, evaluation of their impact, and wider adoption only where measurable benefits are achieved. This evidence-based model ensures services evolve in response to real user needs and remain focused on delivering positive outcomes for residents and staff.

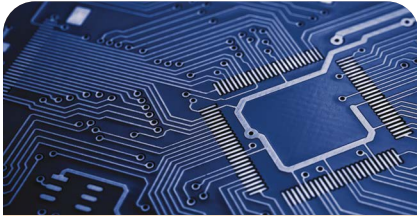
The Council's Digital Team brings together skills in developing processes, enhancing user experiences, and integrating systems to build services that are easy to use, reliable, and efficient. Meanwhile, the ICT team provides specialised support for essential software such as Housing and Revenues and Benefits systems, and oversees moving these to the

cloud. Both teams work closely together, complementing one another and helping fulfill organisational goals, with additional support from business analysts and project managers from the Business Change team.

Development of the GovService digital platform forms a major part of this work. The platform underpins many of the Council's online services and is continually enhanced to improve forms, workflows, and customer journeys.

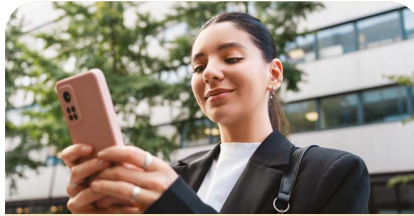
All digital solutions are designed and tested to meet the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) standards, supporting inclusive access for all residents and compliance with public sector accessibility requirements. New technologies are adopted responsibly, ensuring that innovation remains grounded in practicality and long-term maintainability. Digital transformation is a collective effort across the organisation.

The Council's One Team culture, underpinned by values of collaboration, accountability, and continuous improvement, promotes shared ownership of digital progress. A culture of openness and learning is encouraged, enabling staff to contribute ideas, challenge assumptions, and work together to deliver effective, inclusive, and future-ready digital services.



ICT Strategy

- Infrastructure
- Security
- Data governance
- Staff skills
- Operational resilience



Digital Strategy

- Digital Services (web, self service, automation)
- Customer experience
- AI and innovation
- Digital inclusion
- Service transformation

Strategic Alignment

7. Technology

To maintain the safety, efficiency, and adaptability of our digital service, it is necessary to actively manage system lifecycles. By incorporating horizon scanning, the Council will evaluate product roadmaps, contract renewals, and market trends to align technology choices with evolving conditions. Accordingly, strategy coordination with IT and AI initiatives enables a consistent approach across digital and technology services.

The Digital Strategy serves as a complement to ICT Strategy by prioritising customer experience, efficiency, and digital uptake. The ICT Strategy ensures the underlying technology, infrastructure, and governance are robust, secure, and capable. Together, these strategies foster the development of innovative, efficient, and future-ready services.








8. Measures of Success

In addition to corporate KPIs used to assess performance, the varied nature of the Council's services requires the development of a comprehensive dashboard to monitor digital service usage over time and across different platforms. Piloting projects will apply appropriate metrics to evaluate their progress and demonstrate effectiveness.

9. Target Outcomes

The Digital Strategy has been developed to help projects target a number of business outcomes which are also addressed by projects in the wider Business Change and Digital unit:

	Improvements in service quality and customer experience
	Increased income and the facilitation of commercial opportunities
	Tangible savings or cost avoidance through improvements
	Modern and efficient work processes that maximise the use of technology and save time
	Compliance with legislation and regulation

10. Priorities and Delivery Themes

Developing Digital Services

The Council adopted a digital-first approach in 2022, aiming to promote the use of digital services where feasible, in order to allocate staff resources to customers and services with higher needs. Ongoing identification of opportunities for new or enhanced digital services in a changing technological environment supports this strategy. This approach also aligns with the Business Change and Digital project on postage and print opportunities that seeks to reduce reliance on paper and print, to support sustainability and financial objectives.

For local authorities, developing digital services can increase accessibility, efficiency, and organisational resilience. Digital access allows residents to use services at any time, decreases the need for in-person contact, and facilitates inclusive design for individuals with disabilities or limited digital literacy. Digitisation of services reduces demand on frontline staff, allowing greater focus on complex or vulnerable cases. Digitisation can streamline operations, automate certain tasks, and reduce operational costs, which is relevant given budget constraints. It can also provide improved data insights to inform decision-making and service adjustments. Digital platforms may support organisational reform by enabling flexible delivery and modern work practices, and can encourage inclusion through targeted initiatives and community engagement tools. Overall, digital services are positioned as a way for councils to adapt to ongoing changes and future requirements.

Particular focus will be given to how the digital strategy can support Housing and the biggest universal services, and how support will be given to ICT to deliver changes.

11. Developing Digital Services: Action Plan

Ambition	Activity	Outcome
To fully automate processes; no manual intervention required	Develop end-to-end automated digital workflows through the GovService platform, integrating with back-office systems where possible	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More efficient and accurate processing • Faster customer turnaround times
To ensure queries and requests are covered by digital services	Identify and build “missing” digital processes to cover high-volume requests currently handled offline	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased digital coverage • Fewer email or phone contacts • Improved customer convenience
Prevent digital processes creating failure demand*	Undertake failure demand analysis to identify where digital journeys break down, followed by redesign of those services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lower repeat contact • Clearer communication and improved customer trust
Reduce desktop-only design	Implement responsive design and mobile-first development as standard	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourages digital service use • Improved satisfaction and accessibility
Prevent multiple customer accounts being required for different services	Develop single sign-on or shared identity solutions across digital platforms. Opportunity to use Gov.uk One Login	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simpler customer experience • Reduced login confusion and support queries • Encourages digital service use
Improve inconsistent or outdated design styles	Refresh digital service templates and update visual design to align with the Council’s corporate identity and accessibility standards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consistent and accessible user experience • Improved brand trust and usability

**Failure demand is work created because a service failed to do something, did it wrong the first time, misdirected, or set the wrong expectation, requiring the customer to make contact again to get the issue resolved*



12. Improve the Website and Intranet

The Council's website plays a vital role as the digital front door to the organisation, serving a wide range of purposes for residents, businesses, and visitors. It is a primary channel for answering customer questions and directing them to digital services 24/7. Beyond service delivery, the website is also a platform for transparency and accountability, publishing democratic information such as meeting agendas, decisions, and Councillor details. Additionally, it supports communication and engagement by promoting news, consultations, and community initiatives, helping to build trust and connection between the Council and the public. To ensure that website improvements reflect community needs, Stevenage residents will be involved in user testing. This local perspective will help to deliver a digital front door that works for everyone.

12. Improve the Website and Intranet: Action Plan

Ambition	Challenges addressed	Outcome
AI chatbot	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information can be too technical to understand or split across different pages • Website search is only effective for keywords and if they're correctly spelled 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helps people in plain language • Overcomes limitations of current website search • Answer enquiries that cut-across multiple service areas • Can promote use of digital self-service • Opportunity to further develop to provide more services
Redesign homepage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Homepage could be better at helping people navigate the site and finding key services • Missing opportunities to promote the Council's commercial services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easier to find key services and promote digital services • Better showcase the full range of Council services • Fresh look and feel • Better promotion of the Council's income-earning services
Refresh page layout and improve use of pictures and video	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pages can be un-engaging • Extra choices for page layouts can make them more interesting and easier to understand 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Makes browsing more enjoyable and brings services to life • "A picture tells a thousand words; a video a million"

The intranet remains a vital resource in supporting efficient working practices across the Council. As the central hub for staff information and internal digital support services, it plays a key role in keeping colleagues connected and informed. There are significant opportunities to further enhance the intranet by embracing seamless integration with the Microsoft 365 ecosystem. Making the most of the powerful tools already available—such as Teams, OneDrive, and Outlook—will enable staff to enjoy a more joined-up and intuitive digital experience. This approach supports increased productivity and greater flexibility in how teams collaborate and work together, ensuring the intranet continues to meet the evolving needs of the organisation.

13. Adopting AI

AI offers significant potential to transform how digital services can be delivered, making them faster, smarter, and more accessible. By adopting technologies such as chatbots, intelligent telephony, and automated workflows, AI can reduce routine tasks, improve customer experience, boost efficiency, and allow staff to focus on more complex, value-added work.

A clear opportunity lies in expanding AI-powered chatbots to provide instant, accurate answers at any time, while learning from user interactions to improve over time. Similarly, AI in telephony and digital processes can enhance call handling, automate routine tasks, and support better data-driven decisions across the organisation. To work effectively AI systems require access to accurate, up-to-date data and content—such as well-maintained web pages and reliable internal information sources—so projects must ensure this is considered and tested during delivery.

The AI landscape is evolving quickly. New suppliers are entering the market, and established systems are adding built-in intelligence. To make informed choices, solutions will be piloted in low-risk areas, with clear success measures covering usability, accuracy, accessibility, and customer satisfaction. This “test, learn, refine” approach will help us assess value, customer perception, and where human oversight remains essential.

AI also brings new risks — from data privacy and bias to the perception that it replaces human contact. This will be addressed through openness about when AI is in use, strong governance and data protection, and clear escalation routes for complex or sensitive queries.

As AI becomes increasingly common across society, residents and staff will come to expect it as part of normal digital experiences. The aim is to adopt AI responsibly and confidently, ensuring it enhances—not replaces—the human service that customers value.

To ensure AI delivers genuine public value, there will be the strengthening of data quality, governance, and workforce capability, and collaboration with partners across the sector. This will allow the Council to innovate responsibly, learn from others, and ensure every AI deployment is ethical, transparent, and grounded in evidence. Governance, oversight, and the use of tools like Copilot will be guided by the IT Strategy, with an AI policy developed in collaboration to ensure safe and effective implementation. The policy will set out clear boundaries for the use of AI, defining what is and is not appropriate, to safeguard residents, staff, and the integrity of Council services.

13. Adopting AI: Action Plan

AI are likely to present themselves rapidly and the capabilities are changing like no other technology before, although the following currently present themselves as opportunities:

AI Ambitions	Outcomes
AI Website Chatbot	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Significantly improved 24/7 support for residents • Reduced call/email volumes • Improved insight into customer queries quicker responses; data insight into common queries; improved accessibility and customer satisfaction
Intelligent Telephony (speech recognition, call routing)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased 24/7 self-service over the phone, freeing up Customer Services capacity for more complex enquiries • Improved routing of calls so that customers speak to the right person first and boosting efficiency • Reduced call length from features like automated call summarisation
AI automated Digital Workflows (e.g. processing online forms, routing service requests)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Automation of human-like decisions • Improved efficiency and turnaround times • More ability to scale service volumes
AI additions to existing business systems Key opportunity – Planning Application assessments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Automation of a range tasks within existing systems • Improved efficiency and turnaround times • Likely to provide more insight for managers
Contract and procurement tools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make it easier to understand and search contract documents and manage contracts • More efficient collation of business requirement for procurements and comparisons against suppliers

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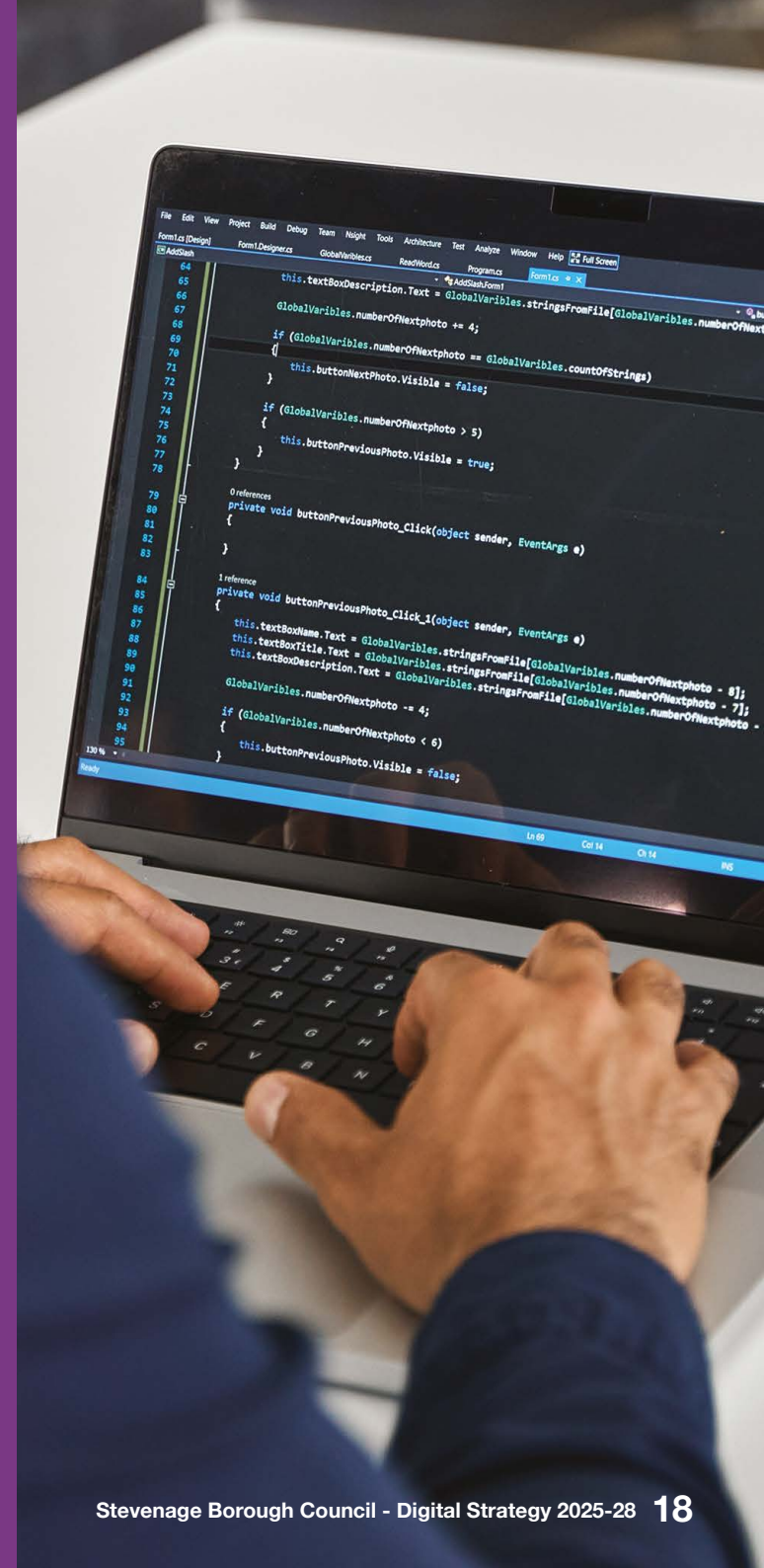
13. Adopting AI: Action Plan continued...

AI Ambitions	Outcomes
Document Summarisation and Search Tools (AI search for policies, minutes, records)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quicker staff access to information • Improved compliance and knowledge sharing
AI-Driven Insight Dashboards (pattern spotting from existing data)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quicker evidence-based decision-making • Reduces bottlenecks on skilled analytic staff
AI-Based Fraud or Anomaly Detection (e.g. housing, benefits, procurement data)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early detection of irregularities • Reduced financial loss • Increased deterrence
AI Support for Repairs and Maintenance Scheduling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Optimised scheduling efficiency • reduced missed appointments
AI-Enabled Accessibility Tools (voice, translation, summarisation)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More inclusive services
AI Policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear governance with defined roles and decision making • Establish clear boundaries for AI use, ensuring transparency, accountability, and alignment with ethical and legal standards

14. Driving the use of Digital Services

To maximise the adoption of digital services, it is essential to create an enabling environment. Challenges such as limited awareness, the continued promotion of non-digital channels, and user-unfriendly digital tools may hinder engagement. When there is low uptake of digital services or poor customer feedback, targeted actions can help to understand the issues and boost usage.

The UK Digital Inclusion Action Plan (2025) introduces the first national strategy in over a decade to address the digital divide. It focuses on supporting local efforts, improving skills, reducing device/data poverty, enhancing service accessibility, and strengthening evidence, while aiming for long-term systemic change and increased confidence. Local authorities are pivotal due to their community trust and ability to integrate digital inclusion across sectors, but progress is hindered by fragmented, short-term funding. Key barriers include poor rural connectivity, unaffordable devices and data, low digital skills—especially among vulnerable groups—and poorly designed digital services. Overcoming these challenges requires coordinated investment, sustained funding, and locally driven solutions led by councils.



14. Driving use of Digital Services Action Plan

Ambition	Activity	Outcome
Build digital inclusion	Deliver targeted skills and confidence building projects with our community partners . Maximise use of external funding	Increased digital capability for residents and reduced reliance on assisted channels
Communications encourage digital contact	Review and rewrite standard letters, templates, and web content to promote digital self-service first	Consistent messaging to prioritise digital services and reduce unnecessary calls
Digitally confident members and staff	Provide training and guidance for members and staff to promote digital options confidently and consistently	Increased advocacy of digital channels and consistent messaging to customers
Enhance user-friendly online services	Apply usability testing and customer feedback to improve key customer journeys	Easier, faster transactions that work on mobile, and improved satisfaction
Improve use of customer feedback and insight	Strengthen capture and use of customer feedback across digital and assisted channels	Evidence-led service design and deeper understanding of service use and customer needs
Increase customer awareness of digital services	Implement targeted promotional campaigns such as through social media, newsletters, and contact centre prompts	Greater awareness and usage of existing online services

15. Summary of Progression and Opportunities 2025-2028



16. Utilising Lessons Learned

Through experience with digital change projects, the Council have come to truly appreciate the dedication and resilience of everyone involved in adapting to new ways of working. It is recognised that embracing change within such a complex environment isn't always easy, and it's natural to encounter challenges along the way. That's why the Digital team are committed to providing thoughtful, tailored support—so that together, these barriers can be overcome to make positive, lasting improvements for everyone.

Category	Situation	Support
People & Culture	Staff are on a journey to improving their digital skills and confidence	Digital skills survey, training, positive communication of achievements
	Staff perspectives on digital change reflect a need for greater involvement, clarity, and confidence-building	Pace change realistically, positive communications, staff engagement, utilise local leadership
Ownership & decision making	Clearer roles and responsibilities can empower teams and improve delivery, especially for cross-service processes	Define and document responsibilities within processes
	Some processes involve subjective decisions, which can be refined to support smoother digital transformation	Review and revise process and policy to enable a digital first approach where possible
	Greater clarity in service standards helps to manage customer expectations	Publish clear standards when updating processes
Systems & insight	Better access to data and insight can strengthen business cases, solution design and service improvement	Develop reporting capabilities for digital services and expand use of customer feedback
	System diversity can lead to inconsistent customer experience and project complexity	Robust project discovery, use of system integration to provide better digital outcomes for staff and customers

Appendix A - Case Studies

Develop Digital Solutions

Example 1 – self-service scanning

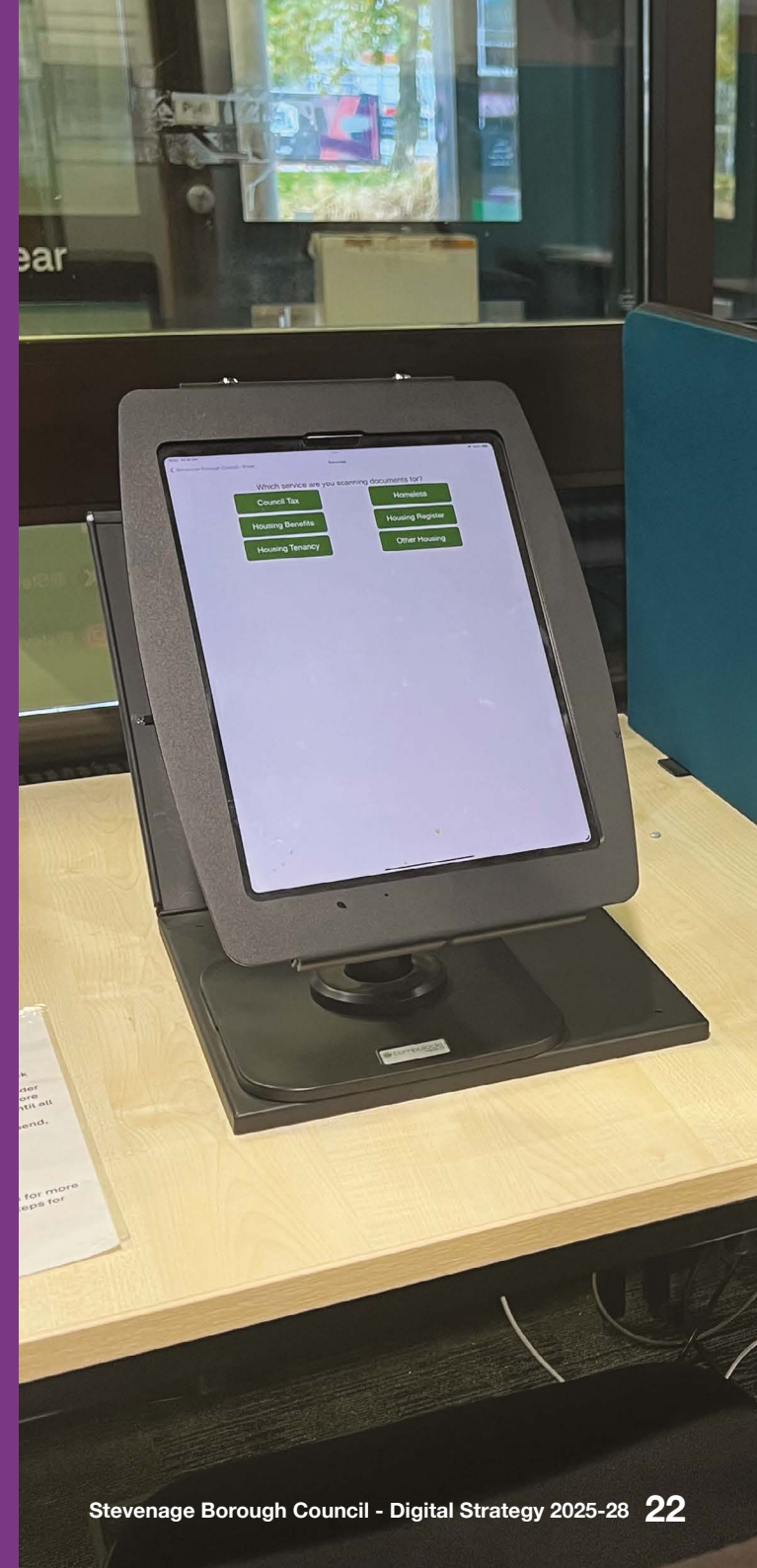
Stevenage Borough Council's Digital team, in collaboration with Customer Services, Housing, and Benefits Services, developed a self-serve scanning solution for customers at the Main Reception of Daneshill House. This digital application, accessible via a smart tablet, allows residents to submit documents required for Council services such as benefits and council tax support. Customers select the service, complete a form with their details, and use the tablet to scan and submit their documents.

Outcomes

Around half of the documents arriving in Daneshill that require scanning are now being scanned by the customer themselves using the self-service tool. As well as freeing up staff capacity for more complex enquiries, it means customers are in control of their original documents reducing the risk of loss.

Further Opportunities

A range of opportunities exist to avoid needing the document to come to the Council's office in the first place. The same technology that powers this scanning device could be used online to allow customers to submit electronic documents from home, for those not requiring in-person authentication. It could also be developed into a mobile-friendly form for staff who need to scan documents while working around the town or in people's homes, simplifying and speeding up existing mechanisms. Moreover, when reviewing processes there may be options to avoid the need for documentation by electronically checking eligibilities with other internal systems or government sources.



Appendix A - Case Studies

Develop Digital Solutions

Example 2 – Stevenage Day applications

Stevenage Borough Council's Communities and Neighbourhoods team faced challenges with the traditional stallholder application process for Stevenage Day. The process involved paper submissions and multiple payment methods, leading to delays and administrative burdens. To modernise this, they implemented a digital pitch booking service using GovService.

Outcomes

This new system eliminated paper submissions and manual data entry, allowing quick access for reviewing, amending, and approving applications. Customers now receive automated emails with payment links, ensuring timely payments. The transition to card payments only has simplified the process and improved security. This digital transformation has significantly enhanced efficiency, reduced errors, and provided a more convenient and secure platform for customers.

Further Opportunities

By rethinking existing paper and spreadsheet-based processes, many can be turned into self-served channels with a range of functionality including payments, document submissions, workflow, case management and bookings.



Appendix A - Case Studies

Develop Digital Solutions

Example 3 – Digital Garage Lettings Process

Stevenage Borough Council's Garage Lettings process used a waiting-list serviced through manually intensive administration, making it inefficient to operate and missing opportunities to rent void garages. The Garages and Digital teams worked together to develop a digital lettings platform in early 2023. This new system publishes a weekly list of available garages and allows customers to view, bid and sign a contract on the property of their choice.

Outcomes

The solution quickly freed up staff time in the Garages team, significantly reduced the void rate and increased income. A big surprise was that many garages previously considered “hard to let” are now quickly being let; demonstrating the power of a different lettings approach.

Following the success of the digital service, additional developments such as garage photos have been added, and new ideas continue to be developed such as adding location maps. This project has shown the benefits of an iterative development approach in which starting simple and building over time helps to simplify and de-risk new initiatives while enabling them to grow through feedback and learning.

Future Opportunities

Digital services offer new ways to package and sell income generating products, so that they're easier for customers to find, understand and buy, while minimising costs. By starting with simple solutions and developing iteratively they provide a way to start more quickly and scale up to optimise customer demand.





Appendix A - Case Studies

Develop Digital Solutions

Example 4 – Automated Telephony

Customer Services were still receiving high volumes of calls about transactional services already available online. To free Customer Service staff up to work on more complex enquiries an automated telephony solution was implemented. Through button presses customers can get recorded answers to common questions and can receive hyperlinks to online services via text message for waste and recycling, grounds maintenance, benefits and council tax. The service is entirely hosted by the supplier meaning it could work with existing phone systems.

Outcomes

The automated telephony answers 40-50% of calls for the services it handles, freeing up valuable staff time and assisting customers with online services. The call options have continued to be developed based on usage data that ensure it remains effective.

Further Opportunities

This solution could be effective for most services where a high proportion of customer calls have standard answers or could be transacted through digital self-service. Newer telephony solutions offer even more versatile functionality including Natural Language Processing to enable customers to talk to the automation instead of pressing buttons, and the ability to build processes into the automation (such as reporting a missed bin).

Appendix A - Case Studies

Improve the Website

Example 1 – Gracie Chatbot

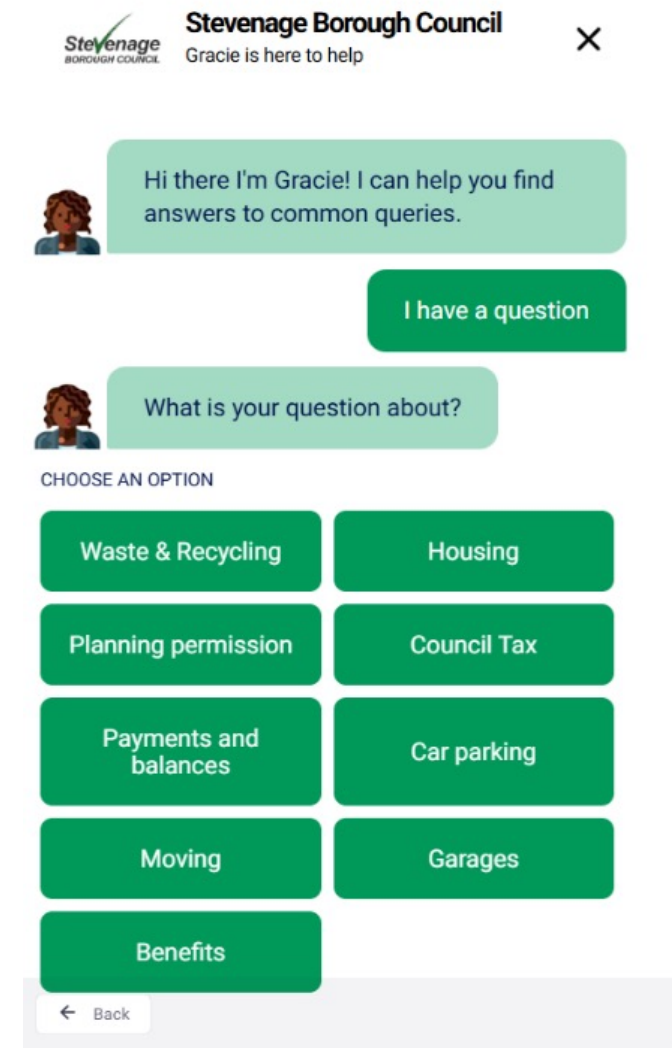
While most customers reach the Council's website from a Google search, others navigate using the website's own search or navigation links, some people can still struggle to find what they're looking for. To help with this, the Gracie Chatbot was built to provide another way to answer common queries.

Outcomes

Gracie has continued to have topics reworded and added in response to customer feedback and for topical queries such as weather-related disruption. The Chatbot assists 66 people per day (around the same as a Customer Services Advisor) for less than £1000 per year.

Further Opportunities

Extra features can continue to be built into this simple decision-tree powered Chatbot, and bots to provide answers on specific topics could also be created, for example to give cost of living advice. At the same time, the advent of generative AI enabled more modern technologies to interact conversationally to help find answers on nearly anything, limited only by the data sources they're connected to. The Council is now looking to upgrade its website Chatbot to this more modern technology.



Appendix A - Case Studies

Improve the Website

Example 2 – Find a Car Park

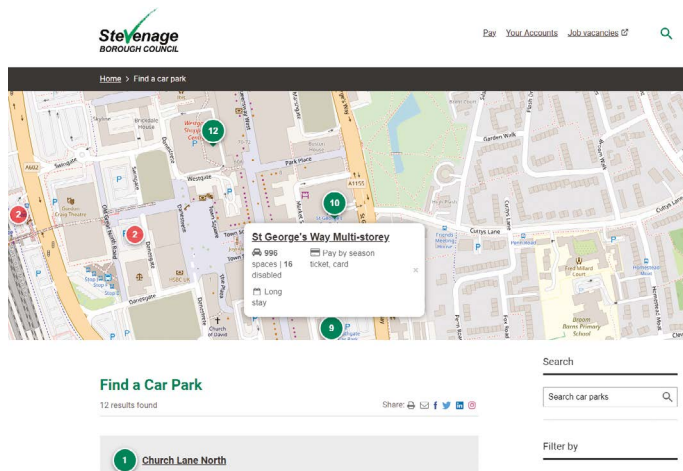
Visitors come to Stevenage for all sorts of reasons including work, shopping, and using the train station. In many of these cases they are looking for somewhere to park, and look to the Council's website to find this information. To make this as easy as possible a map based Find a Car Park page was created which provides key headline information (like number of spaces and accepted payment methods) and links to more detail (like the hourly charging rates).

Outcomes

The Council's Find a Car Park page is one of the most popular on the website (25 pageviews in July 2023-June 2024), eclipsing pages on missed bins and the Autumn fireworks display. At the same time Customer Services receive very few enquiries about this topic, supporting the evidence that the website is successfully telling people what they want to know.

Further Opportunities

Instead of pages of text, rich display can be used in a huge variety of ways to support customer journeys that benefit from alternative presentation and make them more engaging, such as: step-by-step wizard on home composting or recycling, video or animation to explain the Housing Options and Homeless support the Council can and cannot provide, an online calculator to support home budgeting, data dashboards to make Council performance transparent, and interactive consultations to engage the public and improve feedback.



Appendix A - Case Studies

Drive use of Digital Services

Example 1 – Web Wizard

The Kickstart jobs programme funded a 6 month placement of a “web wizard” in Customer Services to engage and support customers one-to-one to use self-service computers or a tablet. The idea was to provide quick assistance to walk-in customers who needed basic support or pre-book more lengthy sessions with people where they need more of a training approach.

Outcomes

The web wizard proved most popular assisting people who already had some limited digital skills but benefited from assistance to build confidence and someone on-hand to answer questions. It also enabled us to learn more about digital exclusion. As the timing of the Kickstart scheme hit a low point in face-to-face contact with customers, the web wizard was used less than there was capacity for.

Further Opportunities

A lack of digital skills and confidence continue to be a barrier preventing people from using digital services, as well as other issues such as connectivity, literacy and learning difficulties. An evidence-based digital inclusion action plan would identify the most significant issues and focus efforts, with opportunities to use external funding and deliver through partners.





Digital Strategy

2025-28

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