

Information, Communication and Technology (ICT) Strategy

2024-2029



‘**Modern technologies and practices** are embedded into the council with a culture of innovation and continuous improvement that is always seeking to **make a difference**’

Foreword

We are delighted to share with you the first ICT Strategy for Westmorland and Furness Council.

Secure and resilient ICT is central to our journey, enabling this Council to be the very best it can be.

We live in a time where technology plays a significant part in all of our lives – for our communities and residents, customers, businesses and visitors, with technology central to how we deliver services.

We want to harness the opportunities that innovative technologies can offer when designing and delivering important services, providing assurance that for those individuals without internet access, experience, or confidence there will be alternative, appropriate ways to access services.

Strong and secure ICT infrastructure is essential to deliver a wide range of council functions in an effective manner. Innovative design has the power to transform, making services simpler, easier to access, and efficient without compromising on quality.

Bringing four legacy councils into one has created significant long-term opportunities for us as a new Unitary Council. It has also however created significant technical challenges in the short to medium term that will take careful planning, time and resources to overcome.

We are ambitious for the future, but also realistic, so this strategy lays out our plans for the next five years, bringing together legacy council ICT services with new emerging technology, supporting our modern workforce, designing, strengthening and improving our offer and customer experience, ensuring always that Westmorland and Furness is...

‘a great place to live, work and thrive’.

Cllr Dyan Jones
Cabinet Member for Customer
and Waste (including ICT portfolio)



Sam Plum
Chief Executive



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ICT Strategy

Westmorland and Furness Council was created in April 2023 with an ambition for our communities, residents, businesses and visitors to make Westmorland and Furness ‘a great place to live, work and thrive’. We are working hard to make sure we can deliver efficient and effective services and are seizing the opportunities we have as a new unitary authority to deliver improved services.

Secure, cost effective, efficient and resilient ICT is essential to delivering good council services and allows us to be adaptable to the changing financial, political and regulatory environment within which the Council operates.

In a time of reducing budgets to deliver services, for which demand is increasing and where customer needs and expectations are changing, we need to be confident that the Council can utilise ICT to support these challenges.

New and emerging technologies could fundamentally change the relationship we have with our customers as it gives us the tools to understand and support them in new and innovative ways.

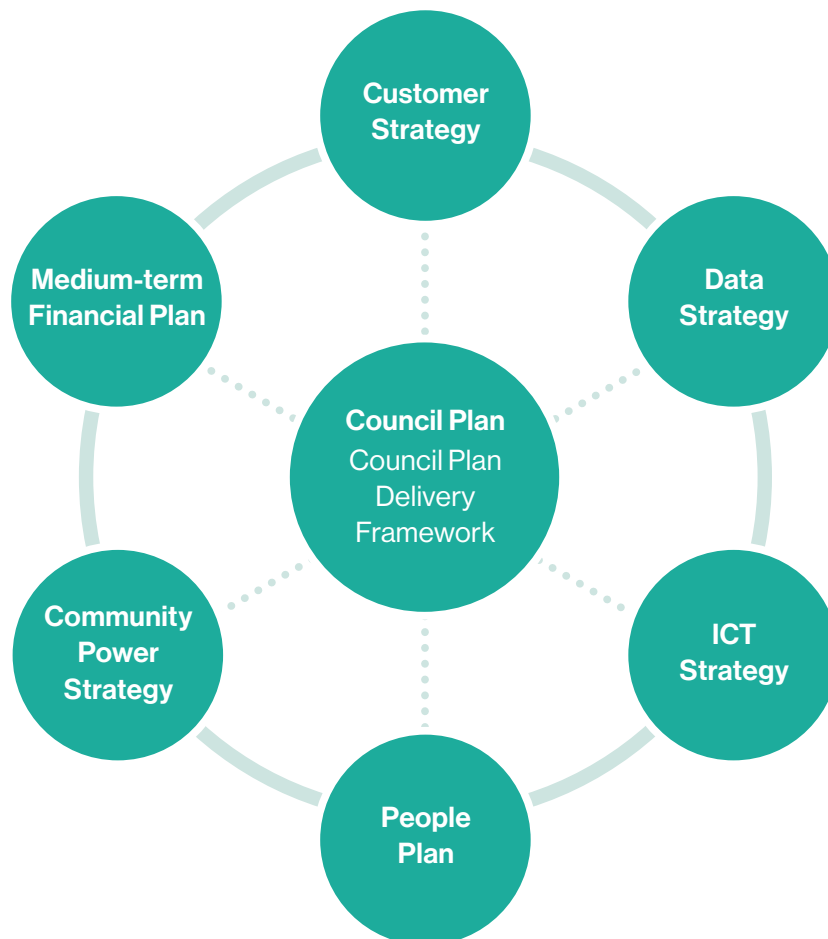
To enable us to deliver the best possible council services, we need to utilise technology to attract, develop and retain staff members, adapting to the changing needs and expectations of a modern workforce.

In addition, we must protect the Council against threats brought by our new digital ways of working and to ensure that safe, secure networks and systems are in place to maintain the delivery of services and to uphold the cyber security of our customers.

This ICT strategy sets out what we want to achieve over the next 5 years using existing and emerging technologies to support delivery of the Council’s priorities and, by so doing, improve the efficiency and effectiveness of council services. The strategy will be reviewed regularly to ensure it keeps pace with developments in the creation and learning from new technology.

The ICT strategy is one of the key foundational strategies that will support the delivery of the Council’s vision and priorities, as detailed in the Council Plan and Council Plan Delivery Framework.

ICT is a pillar for the delivery of all council services. A robust ICT strategy will support the creation and delivery of a suite of Westmorland and Furness foundational strategies including:



To inform this strategy, we have drawn on best practice from the public and private sectors, and insight gained from employee and elected Councillors feedback.

We have an ambition to reduce inequalities and discrimination within Westmorland and Furness. We want to be a council that understands and takes account of the varying needs and experiences of the different groups among our community, working hard to ensure all our customers, staff and elected Councillors are included, supported and celebrated for who they are.

An Equality Impact Screening has been undertaken to assess the impact of the ambitions of this strategy for people with protected characteristics, where no negative impacts were identified. In addition, a potential positive impact was highlighted in relation to utilising ICT to better understand our customers' needs.

Our Vision

Our ICT vision has been shaped by the Westmorland and Furness Council Plan, Council Plan Delivery Framework and Target Operating Model.

We want to utilise technology to deliver better outcomes for the Council and its communities by driving digital change and innovation based on a foundation of inclusive, secure and connected ICT infrastructure to underpin a high-quality ICT service as a key Council enabler.

Strong ICT is key to the delivery of the Council's strategic ambitions therefore this strategy, in the early years as a new council, and in the context of the challenges of merging four legacy councils into one Unitary Council, will detail how we will deliver these ambitions:

Council Plan

- ICT services are the building blocks of the organisation, supporting all priorities within the Council Plan.

Council Plan Delivery Framework

- Modern technologies and practices are embedded into the council alongside a culture of innovation and continuous improvement that is always seeking to make a difference.

Target Operating Model

- **Easy Access:** Services will be user friendly, caring, and accessible through multiple channels. Wherever possible, to be available and delivered digitally, reducing demand for telephone and in-person interactions so that resources can be focused to those in most need.
- **Effective Services:** Services are outcome focused and maximise the use of technology to drive efficiency and effectiveness. Service delivery is citizen centred and seamless between services and partner organisations.
- **'Fit for purpose' technology across the Council** supports the delivery of services, promotes digital ways of working and enables organisational efficiency.

Making our vision real

Where we are now

Westmorland and Furness Council was formed in 2023 and brought together four legacy councils.

The ICT transition to the new Council enabled all services to continue without major negative impacts.

Given the complex technical infrastructure, work is ongoing to maintain service delivery with operational workarounds in place where required as we progress a carefully managed change programme across the medium to longer term.

The ICT programme of work is complex with lots of work still to do. Bringing together the large number of Council systems and different types of infrastructure will be a key focus and challenge. To succeed, we will balance drive and desire alongside realistic timescales and robust risk and change management. Currently, the Westmorland and Furness ICT service supports:

- **100+** Council buildings
- **400+** Servers
- **400+** ICT Contracts
- **500+** Applications
- **3000+** Personal Computers
- **4000+** Mobile Devices

Which are based over the following legacy infrastructures:

- **4** ICT Networks
- **5** Datacentres

With support being provided by the following ICT teams:

- Approximately **24** W&F ICT Staff
- Approximately **100** ICT staff, hosted by Cumberland Council as an interim hosted service

The scale of the ICT programme of works is significant and will require time, investment and resources over multiple years. Disaggregation, aggregation, improvement and integration works will need to take place on a prioritised basis with interdependencies carefully managed and reviewed.

To support the creation of this strategy, feedback has been sought from industry peers, Councillors and our workforce. In addition, we have vital learning and experience from the legacy councils brought together to form the new Westmorland and Furness Council.

This feedback has informed us that:

- ICT is fundamental to delivering all council services – so a true council priority;
- We need to grow our ICT service and invest in the skills and knowledge of the ICT team;
- Business continuity and service resilience is a top priority;
- Emerging technologies should be explored and utilised where appropriate;
- ICT can support the Council's ambitions to reduce our carbon footprint and protect the environment;
- Investment and place greater focus on improving digital skills is required;
- ICT should support the workforce to deliver efficient and effective council services;
- Improvements for accessing systems and services for staff and customers is needed;
- ICT support is crucial to delivering the Council's new target operating model;
- We must ensure that we use high quality and relevant data and intelligence within our ICT systems to support decision making and improve service delivery;
- Technology is vital to develop and deliver high quality services, via ICT business partners ;
- Co-production of digital solutions with the workforce is needed;
- Connectivity and reliable access to key applications and systems is a top priority, ensuring employees and Councillors have the right technology and access to be an agile workforce;
- Storage and filing solutions require greater focus.



What we want to achieve

ICT to be central to the design of all council services, supporting them to become more sustainable in the long term, as well as meeting customer expectations about the way services should be delivered.

Our key aim is to create an ICT service that the Council can be proud of and rely on, which supports our ambition to put customers at the heart of everything we do.

Our journey to ensure the full benefits that technology can bring will need to evolve over time and may need to change as we progress the technical changes and challenges we face.

We will focus on three key outcomes, with annual delivery plans outlining greater detail.

We want to provide an excellent ICT service

We want to provide a service that inspires and supports the transformation of our council services and improvements to our customers' experiences.

We want to be agile

ICT will be a key enabler to developing new products and services, reducing costs across the Council, helping ensure the Council is financially sustainable, supporting our workforce to deliver quality services and providing an improved customer experience.

We want to be secure and resilient

The Council ICT network and systems need to be safe, secure and resilient. Cyber security is a top priority and needs to be embedded into all working practices across the Council. If problems occur, they are resolved promptly to maintain connectivity and maximise system availability.

How we will get there

We need to invest in cost-effective, secure and accessible technologies. Recognising that the significant scale and complexity of ICT changes outlined in our ICT Strategy will take multiple years to deliver, Full Council has agreed additional capital and revenue resources in the Medium Term Financial Plan so that our investment in technology will support the council now and for the future.

Improvements will be prioritised in line with the ambitions in the Council Plan and Council Plan Delivery Framework and support the delivery of the Council's agreed priority areas. This could include a range of collaborative and integrated projects where we will work internally across service teams and externally across our public sector partners to enable efficiency savings and improvements in customer service.

Supporting our customers

Utilising existing and emerging technology to both understand our customers' needs and expectations, and to ensure customers can access our services in a way that best suits them.

We will:

Provide the ICT tools needed to understand our customers' needs to support service delivery, commissioning and decision making across all service areas.

Utilise the expansion of digital inclusion across the Westmorland and Furness area to increase digital engagement with Council's services.

Ensure our customer facing applications are accessible and support the latest equality, diversity and inclusion standards.

Ensure data and information we hold on our customers is respected and well managed in line with our legal and moral obligations by ensuring a 'data protection by design and default' approach.



Supporting our workforce

Working with employees and Councillors to ensure that ICT services are designed and delivered in the best way to enable colleagues to deliver services effectively and efficiently.

We will:

Identify suitable devices and workplace software to maintain secure collaborative working.

Engage with all employees to ensure that cyber security awareness is a key element of our organisational culture.

Create a culture where ICT Business Partners work with council teams to develop ICT services required.

Define an approach to emerging technologies, such as Intelligent Automation (IA) and Artificial Intelligence (AI), with options appraisals to map effectiveness and efficiency.

Engage with staff to ensure that cyber security awareness is cultivated throughout our organisation.

Westmorland and Furness ICT service

The collective expertise and knowledge of the team will be further developed and utilised to provide the Council with resilient, innovative and cost-effective ICT solutions.

We will:

Provide the Council with the ICT needed to deliver its target operating model priority programmes such as Community Focus, Easy Access, Effective Services, Enabling Processes and Supporting Technology.

Carefully manage changes to the technology architecture of the Council – with ICT infrastructure and systems governed centrally to ensure alignment with the Council's target operating model.

Increase the use of platform-based integration, automation and AI solutions to streamline processes and enable cross service working.

Provide safe, secure systems that are reliably available to employees, Councillors and customers via single sign on wherever possible.

Use ICT to support the Council's ambition to become carbon neutral and promote environmental sustainability.

Ensure we design in privacy and security – so that we store and use data we hold about our employees, partners and customers appropriately, and in line with statutory guidance.

Support transformation across the Council.

Manage our cyber risks by ensuring we have the required cyber security skills and knowledge that align to the Central Digital and Data Office and National Cyber Security Centre best practices.

We will develop a timeline to rationalise the number of systems used by the Council to provide the best service with the fewest systems, reducing costs and increasing data integration.

Provide agile infrastructure, enabling new opportunities to be utilised quickly or existing services flexed to meet changes in demand.

To ensure success, we will need to make best use of our resources and will align to Central Government's Digital Services Technology Code of Practice and the Local Government Association's 12 local government digitalisation outcomes:

Digital Services Technology Code of Practice

1. Define user needs
2. Make things accessible and inclusive
3. Be open and use open source
4. Make use of open standards
5. Use cloud first, where possible
6. Make things secure
7. Make privacy integral
8. Share, reuse and collaborate
9. Integrate and adapt technology
10. Make better use of data
11. Define your purchasing strategy
12. Make technology sustainable

Local Government Association's 12 strategic digitalisation outcomes

1. Connectivity
2. Data
3. Democracy and participation
4. Economic productivity and growth
5. Ethics and sustainability
6. Inclusion
7. Leadership
8. Organisational capacity
9. Partnership
10. Security and resilience
11. Services
12. Value

What success looks like

We need to know that our ICT is making a difference, so it is crucial that we measure and evaluate our success. There are several ways in which we will monitor and measure how well we are doing, and whether we are achieving our aims and objectives.

As a new organisation, we accept we have a significant programme of ICT works to stabilise, improve and transform the Council, which will take time to fully implement.

Our measures, together with our priorities, will be reviewed and may need to be adapted and developed on an annual basis to ensure we are measuring our achievements in the best way we can.

Supporting our customers

Utilising existing and emerging technology to both understand our customers' needs and expectations, and to ensure customers can access our services in a way that best suits them.

We would expect to see:

- an increase in the proportion of customer contact delivered through our digital channels.
- increased customers using technology in council buildings such as libraries.
- increase in data driven, customer focused, decision making across the Council.
- improved customer satisfaction.
- reduction in costs and increased efficiency – helping ensure the Council is financially sustainable.

Supporting our workforce and elected members

Working with staff and elected members to ensure that ICT services are designed and delivered in the best way to enable colleagues to deliver services effectively and efficiently.

We would expect to see:

- Increase in the creation and redesign of ICT services that better reflect the needs of our customers and employees;
- Councillors and officers have a high awareness of and commitment to cyber security
- Improved customer and employee satisfaction;
- Reduction in costs and increased efficiency and effectiveness by
 - Automating services, where possible and appropriate
 - Utilising emerging technology, such as artificial intelligence, to support teams and services where appropriate
 - Teams collaborating across the Council and with partners to deliver joined-up services.

Westmorland and Furness ICT service

The collective expertise and knowledge of the team will be further developed and utilised to provide the Council with resilient, innovative and cost-effective ICT solutions enabling delivery of service transformation.

We would expect to see:

- Increase in ICT projects and programmes that carefully progress the key stages of stabilisation, improvement and transformation to help deliver the Council's target operating model;
- Increase in trained and digitally aware staff;
- Increase in agile infrastructure to support new and existing services;
- Resilient, available, safe and secure systems for employees, Councillors and customers
- Reduction in costs and increased efficiency and effectiveness by
 - reducing the number of systems used across the Council
 - increasing the use of platform-based integration, automation and AI solutions where appropriate.

We are ambitious to achieve significant change however realistic that the scale and complexity of work to deliver the aims of this strategy will be delivered over the next 5 years.

An annual delivery plan setting out key activities and milestones for 2024/25 can be found [here](#).

During the first year we will further refine the single programme of works and further develop ICT service Key Performance Indicators and Service Level Agreements to measure the success, ensuring transparency and accountability for the performance of the ICT Service.

In addition, the Technology Programme Board will monitor and report on the success measures for all projects, actions and programmes in the ICT Strategy annual delivery plan.



Translation Services

If you require this document in another format (e.g. CD, Braille or large type) or in another language, please telephone: **0300 373 3300**.

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