

# Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council ICT Strategy 2017



Stockton-on-Tees  
BOROUGH COUNCIL

*Xentrall*

Shared Services  
Delivering Excellence for All



# Introduction

A close-up photograph of a person's hands using a black stylus on a tablet. The person is wearing a black smartwatch on their left wrist. The tablet is on a wooden desk, and a white mouse is visible in the background. The person is wearing a plaid shirt. The background is a bright, out-of-focus office environment.

This is this latest ICT Strategy, yet the focus and themes of its predecessor still chime with current times as they are equally valid in what continues to be an extending challenging period for local government. Balancing Council finances whilst meeting the needs and pressures of service delivery are foremost in people's minds.

Information and communication technology will help.

In fact, thoughtfully combined with, and often underpinning; streamlined service provision, customer channel shift, a flexible/agile workforce and most importantly a service improvement mind-set and culture, the exploitation of information and communication technology is possibly the only way to ensure in the longer term that the Council continues to not only meet the basic needs of the people it serves, but to still have the wherewithal to fulfil its wider aspirations and goals for the Borough and ultimately thrive.

In the final year of the previous ICT Strategy, the Council has targeted dedicated resources to drive forward a business transformation theme within its Big Picture Programme. Termed: Smarter Working in Stockton, this transformation programme is to deliver across a number of areas which are focussed on assisting services with improving their own processes and use of technology for service delivery. This approach supports the future state aspirations outlined above.

Ultimately, technology is about people and we are on a journey involving lots of change and this will require lots of support and understanding. Other Council initiatives such as Shaping a Brighter Future can and will assist with this as combined they set out a higher vision of service transformation for all.

There are hearts and minds to be won.

# Achievements

In reviewing our achievements from the last ICT Strategy, the technology elements of the vision for the typical end user as laid out in the 2013 document have been met in full:



The aim for a typical ICT user is to be able to securely access their desktop and telephony services from different locations within the Council and via mobile and home-based technologies, with wireless access where appropriate. A standard and secure method of authentication to systems will be in place and a centralised approach to data storage and backup will ensure that the same information is available regardless of the point of access. Wherever the user accesses ICT, the facilities will be the same and have all good practice governance elements build in. This whole architecture will be made as flexible as possible to allow the Council to change size and shape as alternative delivery models are deployed and re-shaped.



But the second element of this vision, the exploitation of these technical facilities, is still to be maximised, or even become commonplace in many service areas. Again, an extract from the previous ICT Strategy:

This underpinning architecture gives a suitable platform for services to adopt, adapt and exploit systems and technologies to work more efficiently and deliver real value to the customer. It also allows us to deliver on our ambitions for transformational services (both internal and external) which are modern and appropriate in that they are flexible, interactive, responsive and delivered in an efficient and timely manner.



This is where the Big Picture and Smart Working programmes fit in.



# Challenges Ahead and Principles to be Applied

**The following principles have been carried forward from the previous ICT Strategy as they are still a valid guide as to how we should be managing ICT assets. In addition, two new principles have been included, to reflect the changing nature of ICT applications and their interoperability and the ever present cyber security threat.**

It is the role of the Smarter Working in Stockton Board to champion and up-hold these principles.

There are many challenges facing the Council, with financial pressures being foremost and affecting all aspects of its business. Therefore, affordability, efficiency, targeted investments and maximising the use of existing ICT assets are all factors which will be uppermost when considering technology related initiatives.

**Principle 1** **Services should put technology at the core of their service transformation with appropriateness and value for money being the tests for any technology related business case.**

The continued financial pressures also give rise to uncertainty about the future, in terms of the scope, shape and delivery of Council services. This increases the likelihood of service commissioning and shared services, together with out-sourcing and in-sourcing of services as economies dictate. For those involved in the design, procurement, commissioning or delivery of future services, it is clear that they need to be suitably competent in their use of ICT systems to maintain appropriate levels of efficiency and effectiveness in their work, both alone and in collaboration with others.

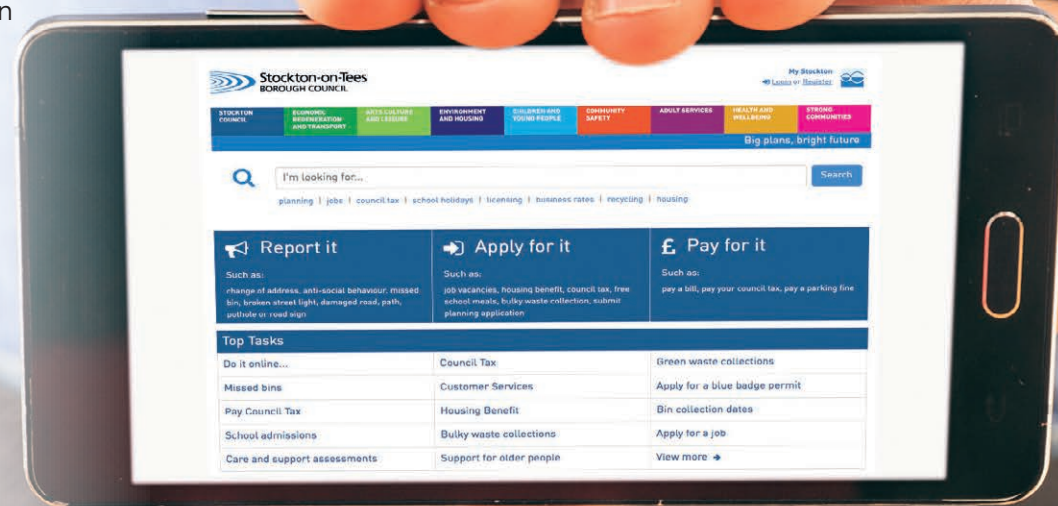
**Principle 2** Those using ICT systems should have the correct technologies to aid them in their work and an appropriate level of skill to use these effectively.

The Council's Access to Services Strategy acknowledges the benefits technology can bring in terms of both improving service delivery and reducing cost. Channel shift to more cost-efficient methods is a key aim of this strategy and is seen as a viable route to the continued delivery of a wide range of Council services against a backdrop of on-going reductions in resources. Moving forward, this continues to be a major programme for the Council.

**Principle 3** Migrating services on-line should be the default position of any procedural/service development or review, or procurement of ICT systems, and an end-to-end approach should be adopted.

To give an oversight of all ICT projects and ensure the correct targeting of what are finite resources, the Information Systems Strategy (ISS) development work gives clarity to each service's information system requirements and highlights the differences in approach and priorities across the Council in terms of existing and future ICT systems. The ISS process allows an ICT Work Plan to be developed which identifies projects, resources and timescales for delivery.

**Principle 4** Existing ICT assets should be reviewed, rationalised and exploited as far as possible to maximise gain and eliminate waste.



Another output from this ISS work is the identification of common corporate projects for inclusion in the ICT Work Plan. These represent development areas that have been identified by several services and therefore have a corporate priority and in some cases have the potential to be Council-wide systems.

**Principle 5** A corporate approach should be considered where several services have similar ICT requirements.

The success of the architecture programme is that it provides a resilient and secure platform on which to do business and in supporting both main service applications and end users alike. This platform extends out to the desktop and mobile world beyond, thus building availability and flexibility into the overall approach. Married together with the service based projects, this allows the underlying technology to become the catalyst for service transformation and an enabler for business.

**Principle 6** Information technology should be a catalyst for transformation and the enabler of business. It should not be an obstacle. It should be resilient, scalable, secure and easy to use.



To assist with the delivery of the Council's digital programme, the ICT service has taken an approach of creating and working with digital web services known as APIs (Application Programming Interfaces - routines, protocols and tools for building software applications). An API based approach provides access to what is a rich pool of data from Council ICT systems and this can facilitate new online services which can help citizens interact more effectively online with the Council.

With this in mind, it is important that when procuring ICT systems we build upon the principles of placing technology at the core of service transformation and migrating services on-line to enable us to focus on the digital outcomes we want to achieve and how these can be delivered through information in distributed systems. This may in turn enable the formation or procurement of cloud native services i.e. systems which are built specifically for the cloud and not merely adapted to it.

**Principle 7** **Unlock the power of our applications and data through an API approach to deliver great digital services and online customer journeys.**

In an ever threatening cyber world, as we increasingly rely on ICT systems for the daily functioning of the Council our approach to ICT security is critical to the success of our services and the safety of the individuals on whom we hold information. To ensure on-going security patching, supplier support and compatibility across our systems, the Council will only run supported ICT applications and software. In exceptional circumstances where this is not possible, the Council's SIRO (Senior Information Risk Owner) will formally recognise the risk and approve the risk mitigation and treatment plans, including a definitive time bound plan for the removal or replacement of the application or software.

**Principle 8** **We will ensure that there are no unmanaged risks from legacy systems and unsupported software.**



# The Strategic Priorities for ICT

These themes capture the strategic areas of focus for the ICT Service and in turn the services it delivers to the Council.

## ICT Governance and ICT Service Development

### **The restructure of the Council's senior management team and associated services has changed elements of the governance of the ICT Service.**

This ICT Strategy and the main ICT architecture projects are monitored as part of the Smarter Working in Stockton transformation programme along with ICT focussed reporting and discussion at the Council's Senior Management Team. Service lead ICT projects still form the basis of each Directorate's Information System Strategy and there continue to be formal two-way communication and feedback mechanisms in place between these Directorates and the ICT Service to ensure that effective management takes place.

Similar management, monitoring, reporting and feedback mechanisms are in place at Darlington Council to ensure the overall commitment against what is a shared ICT resource is transparent and managed as one co-ordinated process. Any exceptions or resourcing conflicts are managed by the ICT Service in collaboration with both groups of contacts within the Councils.

The management of this shared resource is also overseen by the Xentrall Executive Board whose members are the Deputy Chief Executive of Stockton, the Director of Neighbourhood Services and Resources of Darlington and the Assistant Director of Xentrall Shared Services.

Another element of ICT governance is the auditing of the ICT service by a number of means, both internal and external, to ensure it complies with best practice methods and standards.

Alongside these compliance regimes, the ICT Service also manages a formal service improvement programme which is influenced by these and other factors. The service is proud of its embedded service improvement culture and commitment to on-going staff development which supports this culture and service delivery. Combined, these activities provide a professional, driven and healthy environment to flourish in, which is to the benefit of both Councils.





## ICT Strategic Architecture

**Previous and on-going investments in strategic ICT architecture have borne fruit in terms of improved resilience, performance, accessibility, flexibility, usability and security.**

All the core technologies that underpin Council ICT services are shared with Darlington Council and this has delivered significant benefits in the categories listed above as well as ensuring the on-going affordability of the solutions deployed. In respect of this, each Council manages an ICT Architecture Budget Plan which encompasses current and future investments. Both plans are similar in content as they are a reflection of this successful and innovative partnered approach.

There is a continual programme of architecture change to keep pace with the new developments in technology which present new and real opportunities to the Council. There is also the continual challenge of dealing with the obsolescence of ICT systems and technologies, which often present opportunities in their own right.

Cloud computing is one of these opportunities. Although a term often misunderstood and misused, the ability to receive ICT services direct from a hosting supplier can have some advantages. There can also be disadvantages which need to be transparent and understood before any commitments are made and the increased capacity and affordability of on premise infrastructure is a factor to be considered in any assessment process.

Through the life of this ICT Strategy the option to take cloud services for ICT applications will increase. Sometimes this may be forced upon the Council, directly or indirectly by a supplier, as possibly the only means of accessing their products. In all cases, a pragmatic approach will be taken and the ICT Hosted Services Guide used to inform any assessment process and decision.

Another factor which can influence ICT architecture is the need for the Council to work collaboratively with other partner organisations. The nature and number of partnerships the Council has is increasing and this can sometimes mean a collaborative approach to ICT solutions needs to be taken. In some cases this may result in the Council not being the lead in terms of ICT provision, with remote access to a partner's ICT services being required.

A result of the above factors, is the inevitability over time that the Council will run an increased mix of hosted and on premise ICT systems, as well as facilitating access to other partner organisation systems. This will bring with it the challenge and opportunity of managing a mixed ICT estate, managing on-line supply chains and liaising with our partners.

A consequence of this more mixed estate will be a meaningful reduction of on premise systems which in turn can allow a downsizing of the supporting ICT infrastructure at key points of renewal. Such moves will be reflected in the ICT Architecture Budget Plan.



## Council Service Development and Transformation

**As outlined in the introduction to this strategy, there are now formal corporate programmes in place to deliver service transformation across the Council under the Big Picture banner.**

These encompass: Smarter Working in Stockton, the Digital Services Group, Lean activities currently in Children, Adults and Community Services, and the more recent concept of Smart Thinking in Stockton.

This ICT Strategy and the ICT service compliment and support these programmes and in turn such initiatives can be the key delivery mechanism for the exploitation element of this strategy, which is a critical factor in transforming services as endorsed by Principle 1 stated earlier:

**“Services should put technology at the core of their service transformation and appropriateness and value for money should be tests for any technology related business case.”**

Simply raising awareness to the possibilities information and communication technologies can bring to service delivery and day to day working is a key aim for this strategy and the associated transformation programme of the Council. This approach also recognises that ICT users will be in different places on their “technological journey”.

The ICT Service will continue to invest time in educating the ICT user community in security matters and best practice methods. Their vigilance, together with the investment in perimeter security defence technologies, helps to mitigate the increasing risk of ICT-related security incidents and the impact these can have on both physical and on-line Council services.

A key activity over the life of this ICT Strategy will be the migration of the desktop office software to a cloud based suite of products, as the current on premise licensing reaches end-of-life in 2020 and beyond. Both Google and Microsoft heavily promote the collaboration features of their respective on-line office suites and these, combined with the often underutilised tools in the existing document and spreadsheet products, have the potential to improve the productivity and effectiveness of individuals, teams and the services they deliver. And through service transformation and integration, this exploitation of technology deployment can also positively impact other aspects of the functioning of the Council, in terms of officer mobility, team dynamics, service agility and the use of smart office space and buildings.

The challenge lies in promoting and raising awareness to ensure that all teams and services understand what these changes and

opportunities can mean for them, as without this understanding and self-drive, the full potential of the benefits will not be realised as the desktop changes go unnoticed by the majority. Therefore, the opportunities arising from these changes will be a key part of the success of the transformation programme, as will appropriate training in the tools deployed.



## Taking Action

The following live documents are referred to in this ICT Strategy and combined not only do they describe the overall environment in which this strategy sits, but they also at any point in time, detail the current actions being taken and those planned in each of the three strategic priorities described above:

- Information on the Council's Big Picture programme can be found on the Intranet at <https://intranet.stockton.gov.uk/big-picture>
- Detail of the Council's Smarter Working in Stockton programme will be published on the [Intranet home page](#).
- Detail of the Council's Shaping a Brighter Future programme can be found on the Intranet at <https://intranet.stockton.gov.uk/sbf>
- The ICT Work Plan which details all current and planned ICT projects for both Stockton and Darlington Councils can be found on XIP at <https://xip.xentrall.org.uk/ict/i-need-information-about/project-work>
- The ICT Service Improvement Programme which details the current improvement works across the ICT Service can be found on XIP at <https://xip.xentrall.org.uk/ict/i-need-information-about/ict-service-developments>
- The ICT Sunburst Diagram and Balanced Scorecard which although not mentioned in this strategy, gives an overview of major ICT projects and service performance and can be found on XIP at <https://xip.xentrall.org.uk/ict/i-need-information-about/ict-service-developments>

