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Vision: Digital First

Wycombe District council

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1 Introduction

This document provides a vision for a Digital First WDC. It has been developed through a series of stakeholder interviews across the organisation including both members and officers. The vision is our response to the recognition that we live in a new era, with growing expectations from all, both outside the organisation and within.

Scope

The vision looks to the future and captures the aspirations we have heard and brings them together with what we see as the relevant trends. This is a non-technical document, it doesn't provide details of how, but looks more to what we want to achieve, what we want to be and what we will need.

Audience

This is a non-technical document intended to be accessible to a broad range of stakeholders.

2 Where we are today

We can be proud of our successes

WDC is an organisation that has a track record of managing change. Over two years into the corporate plan and the successes are apparent, resulting from careful streamlining of services and a strong focus on growing revenue streams from several significant development projects. This means that WDC are now in a strong position, as an efficient organisation with a proven track record in growing their income.

Participants talked about the success of QVR14 as a good illustration of how the organisation can work well together. It provided strong internal communications, a suitable governance model and the use of champions in the various service areas. This helped enable true engagement across the organisation, which helped to address concerns as they arose and developed a shared level of responsibility and a targeted ownership in the various service areas.

We are now in a position to look forward to the future, to build on our strong foundations and proven track record for change. To ask ourselves what is next, what can help us deliver a better WDC for our community?

More work is needed to adapt to changing customer demands

Talking to stakeholders, several themes emerged when they considered where we were today, and the challenges we faced.

Years of austerity have meant an understandable focus on cost saving, IT has been a clear area where money could be saved by deferring upgrades, making cost sensitive selection of services and cutting back on maintenance. In short, we have had a make do and mend attitude. However, talking to stakeholders it is clear that this is now impacting how we

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operate. Participants routinely spoke of how IT could be a barrier, they would have to find workarounds (often knowing it wasn't the "right" thing to do). They spoke of requiring multiple logins for systems and challenges working with external organisations, they spoke of not being able to access the technology they saw used elsewhere and the frustration that caused. In short, they felt IT slowed them down, it wasn't an enabler.

Similarly, the challenges with the Capita IT contract although now under control have left a deep impression. A lack of faith in the reliability of IT systems. Understandably, this dampens enthusiasm to explore issues, assuming a failure in IT (rather than asking for support), or to look for improvements.

The speed of decision making was also raised, with participants citing the decision to adopt iPads which started with the original iPad and by the time the discussions concluded the iPad Air2 was available, several generations down the line and years of missed opportunity.

Participants spoke about the limited use of social media, providing several examples where WDC, through chance, came to hear of a raging debate by concerned citizens. But, even when aware, did not have the processes in place to respond. Fundamentally, for the citizen, WDC are not part of the debate and are unable to address concerns or correct misunderstandings.

Systems, and therefore data, are fragmented due to no single agreed architecture for systems. There is therefore, no shared view of the customer or of properties. This particularly poses problems for officers in the community who are often expected to know the bigger picture. But it also leaves WDC open to fraud with dishonest citizens exploiting this blindness.

We live in a world dominated by Digital businesses

We now live in a new era, where peoples' expectations of good customer services have been raised by the successful Digital businesses that dominate our lives; they compare our services to their on-line experiences with Amazon, Google and Apple. The speed of information has changed too, social media connects the public and information spreads faster than ever. This means that poor customer experiences are no longer managed in isolation, they are part of a broader dialogue. However, this shift provides an opportunity. Organisations that realise we live in the "Age of the Customer" can learn from these Digital businesses, develop closer relationships with their customers and ultimately prosper by focusing on delivering outstanding customer services. To do this they must examine the culture, practices, processes and technologies that have made Digital businesses so successful.

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3 Vision

3.1 What we want to achieve

Our investment in being "Digital First" will deliver in three key areas:

- **Better, faster customer services**
  Customers will receive frictionless services, based around their needs. As they access our services they will feel known to us and be not required to repeat themselves or provide information they should expect us to know. Beyond this, our focus will be on customer service and this will be evidenced by our exceptional Net Promoter Score, sentiment analysis and qualitative feedback.
- **Improved operational efficiency**
  As we digitise our processes, we will simplify and automate as much as possible, seeking to enable self-service and processes that require zero or minimal human interaction. This will result in an accumulation of savings which means Digital First will cover its long-term costs.
- **Building new revenue streams**
  We have proven our ability to expand commercially, and the importance of developing commercial services. We believe Digital provides further opportunities to bring in new revenue streams, from providing further value added services to residents, local organisations and partners, including neighbouring councils.

Fundamentally, we believe that investing in Digital will provide: a better experience for all, improved customer service for the majority, through our digital channels and importantly, more targeted specialist support through our non-digital channels.

3.2 What we want to be

An outstanding customer service organisation. Actively engaged with the community in a purposeful dialogue, we will reach out to where our customers are and then, ensure our services are designed around our customers' needs. We will be proactive to the changing customer demands and concerns, acting quickly and remaining relevant. We will be known for serving all in the diverse range of our community whilst being commercially strong, operationally efficient and self-sufficient. As a modern forward looking organisation we will be seen as leading local government organisation in Digital.

Key Themes:
- **An outstanding customer service organisation**
  We will be known as an outstanding customer service organisation. Our services will be built around our customer needs, looking from the outside in, to ensure our services are designed around their journey not our structures. We will understand where our customers interact with other organisations and so our services make sense within the wider eco-system, not just in isolation. This will mean engaging with customers across multiple channels, including social media. Our services will be digital first, enabling more targeted specialist non-digital support for those that need it. We will benchmark ourselves not against other LGOs but against the customer service sector.

- **Actively engaged with the community – a dialogue**
  We will be actively engaged with the community, and will establish an ongoing dialogue. This means our focus will move away from traditional print and we will seek out where communities are discussing topics important to them. We will use this to ensure we are more in tune with current concerns and are able provide the facts before misconceptions take hold. We will ultimately be closer to the customer and use this to help source ideas for how we can improve our services and the district as a whole. When there is the opportunity, we will also work with other local community organisations to share ideas and collaborate.
- **Be proactive - not just reactive - fleet of foot**
  We will be proactive and be fleet of foot. This means we will be able to act quickly on new opportunities and not be hampered by process that doesn't add value to the organisation. We will act on ideas whilst they are fresh and relevant, rather than accept delays due to process. We will maintain pace.
- **Be commercially strong - a brilliant hybrid business**
  Building on our commercial successes, we will be seen as a brilliant hybrid business. Commercial will not be the heart of what we do, we are a customer service business, however, we will have a focus on operational efficiency and be commercially minded in the decisions we make. We will be self-sufficient and not reliant on outside grants, will generate revenue through digital with the same ambition as bricks and mortar.
- **A modern forward looking organisation - Leading local government organisations in Digital**
  We will be known as a modern forward looking organisation. This will mean looking both at the changing needs of our customers as well as changing trends and opportunities. We will be seen as a leading LGO in Digital.
- **We think Digital first - not just electronic forms**
  We think Digital first, this isn't an electronic form, a duplicate of our paper processes; it is a different way of thinking, starting with the customer and requiring a shift in our culture and operating model.

3.3 What we need

We will need to develop new skills, adopt new governance processes and invest in a Digital Platform, to support our new Digital services. IT needs to be more accessible for officers and members; we need IT that encourages people to do the right thing, as opposed to finding the workarounds. We will need to be brave and challenge people to work in better ways, taking the customers' perspective and challenging assumptions.

Key Themes:

- **Easier IT**
  IT that encourages and assists people to work the right way, not force them to find the workarounds. Based on trust and education, officers and members will have IT that works for them, whilst remaining secure and protecting our customers. To enable this we will seek to exploit cloud technology, and have a platform that provides simple access to a range of services, consolidates data and enables us to build excellent Digital services.

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- **No more "make do and mend"**
  We need a different mindset, investing to be more efficient in the future, investing in better customer services, investing in getting closer to the community.
- **Access to the capacity, skills and experience required for the necessary changes**
  We will invest to make space for people to learn, and think. As well as recognising that we will need to bring in new skills and experiences to build new capabilities. We need a central team that will be an agent for change, driven by a shared learning experience. Acting as a hub, the team will enable the rest of the organisation to change. With key skills in customer engagement, service design and project management.
- **Delegated authority**
  To be fleet of foot and support agile decision making. This will be enabled by several factors, perhaps most importantly delegated authority to suitable individuals who can operated inside an agreed framework.
- **A clear set of principles and single architecture**
  To support decision making we will operate against a clear set of design principles and a single shared architecture for the organisation, linking business, data and systems.
- **Platform to build great services**
  At the heart of our IT estate will be a platform that will enable us to build a connected organisation and deliver exceptional Digital services. The platform will enable integration, provide consolidated data, a means to develop new services and applications, with secure access to key services through a single-sign-on.
- **Empowered and working as one organisation**
  Looking from the outside in, we will be seen to be empowered, to make decisions and act as one organisation.
- **Challenge people to work in better ways**
  We will need to challenge people, internally and externally with our partners, to work in better ways and be less accepting of the status quo. We will challenge people to take the customers' perspective, and challenge their assumptions.
- **HR will help develop digital literacy and establish the digital mindset**
  HR will be crucial to building the digital literacy within the organisation and ensuring that no one is left behind. Underpinning the change, is cultural change and establishing the digital mindset, this won't happen without strong change management.
- **Provide more support to improve digital literacy externally**
  We need to support customers accessing our digital channels, we will offer this support through the self-service area but also by working with partners in the community, for example Citizens Advice, so that they can support customers on our behalf.

3.4 Who inspires us

When thinking about the organisations that inspire us we look to John Lewis, for their outstanding customer service and commitment. Amazon, for how they can provide a fully on-line service and consistently seek to simplify their services through voice activated systems and "Internet of Things" sensors. We also admire Lidl, for their sharp focus on who they serve and we remember the broad diversity of our district. As an organisation which has to offer universal services, we recognise how we must ensure we can provide services that work for the majority as well as targeted services for those that need additional support.

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3.5   What it will look like

Digital First will change how customers feel about us, finding that we are working with them, making their lives simpler through our customer centred services. They will have access to our services 24/7, but more importantly, they will be able to access our services when and from where it makes sense for them to do so. They might access our services via a smartphone whilst waiting for public transport, or acting in the moment by reporting graffiti via the WDC citizen app. The focus on a frictionless experience will mean they have minimum gateways, and find that we do the hard work to make it simple for them. We access and make use of the information we have; treating data as a valuable asset. We will access the data citizens have previously provided, but also automate other means of information capture, for example use of location information from mobile devices or by accessing public data sources. This not only means we can reduce the information they need to provide, but it also means we will automate and intelligently navigate citizens through our services. As a core principle, we will automate as much as possible, with the ultimate principle that whenever possible we should remove any requirement for citizens to act. For example, automatically correcting mistakes once they have been detected, as opposed to requiring a customer to complete an on-line form.

Understanding that citizens don't always understand what is the responsibility of WDC and what is the responsibility of County, we will intelligently route citizens to County services. We will understand that our focus should be on their needs, if they require assistance with parking we will seek to address their need, accepting that to do this we need to also understand how they interact with third parties, as well as ourselves.

We will be able to respond quickly to concerns as they arise through and using social media. We will deploy tools that will automatically monitor multiple channels and enable us to proactively respond. Customers will find that we are able to go to where conversations naturally form and provide clear and constructive input; importantly it will feel like a genuine dialogue. We will be truly responsive and, as a result, closer to the customer, by using the tools and processes required to bring our subject matter experts into the conversation.

Customers will also find that our non-digital channels provide more targeted specialist support. For customers who lack confidence in using digital services, we will provide either direct support or support through local organisations, to show them how to search, problem solve and transact via our digital services. As a result, we will be seen as having a positive impact on the district, by improving citizens' confidence in accessing on-line recourses.

The efficiency and high quality nature of our services will mean that neighbouring councils will see the benefit and value of WDC providing services on their behalf. This may enable new revenue streams that mean the Digital First initiative may do more than simply cover its costs, it will become a net contributor.

The success of Digital First will mean that we have better, faster customer services. We will continue to drive operational efficiency through the use of the tools, practices and processes associated with successful Digital businesses. Also, through our demonstrable service improvement and/or operational efficiency, we will reduce costs and/or generate new revenue streams.

Appendix A: The Digital Approach

Defining Digital

An important element of defining a Digital strategy for an organisation is providing a clear and universally understood definition of what we mean by the term – "Digital". Organisations need to recognise that they are not starting with a blank sheet of paper; people will have their own understanding of the term, and often they will equate Digital with Social Media. Within the public sector, the Government Digital Service (GDS) has had the influence to build up an awareness of a broader definition for Digital and a clear exemplar with the DVLA's Vehicle Tax service. We choose to use the popular and concise definition that has been put forward by Tom Loosemore, who at the time was working for the Government Digital Service. We define Digital as follows:

Digital means applying the culture, practices, processes and technologies of the internet era to respond to people's raised expectations.

Quote 1: Common definition of Digital[1]

This definition highlights the importance of the "customer", their raised expectations and is suggestive of the organisations that are successful. These internet era organisations should be seen as your competitors, not because they compete in the traditional sense, but because they raise the bar and define what is accepted as good service.

Digital Processes

At WDC, as with many Public Sector Organisations, there is a strong awareness of the drive for "paperless" services and processes. Often, this has been a key pillar of a broader aspiration to be Digital by Default and often with a focus on cost reduction.

A clear inference we should take from the desire to be paperless Is that although Emailing a word document, or completing a "web form" online, requires no paper is an electronic process not a digitised process. When we design a digital process we will reimagine how things should work from the customers' perspective. A digital process automates as much as possible, has access to the data required (only requires the customer to "tell us once" and removes internal re-entry) and removes superfluous steps.

Forrester provides a model that was built up from its Digital Leaders Forum 2017, the model covers three perspectives:

- Digital Experience
  Processes should be focused on enhancing the customer experience, understanding where in the journey they are and offering a service at a time and through a medium that is convenient and relevant. Interactions should be intuitive, informed (i.e. have knowledge of the customer) and ideally proactive (anticipate their needs).

- Digital Operations

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[1] https://gds.blog.gov.uk/2016/06/23/good-culture-evolves-from-the-bottom-up/

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Processes should be automated wherever possible and build around the customer journey. To enable this, systems need to be connected and there is a requirement for a single reference to a customer. Processes need to be flexible, and adjust to change in customer demands and the environment. Finally, metrics should be focused on customer outcomes; analytics is key to providing the management information required to learn and adjust operations.

- Digital Ecosystem
  The customer journey will often cross multiple organisations; a customer choosing a hotel is likely to use multiple sources before making the final booking. An organisation's processes need to be developed with this in mind. Where partnerships with other organisations provide an improved customer experience they should be examined.

We define Digital First to be distinctly different to Digital by Default. Digital First will focus on building better, faster customer services, which also make commercial sense.

Digital is a learning practice

Designing and developing digital processes is distinctly different to developing traditional processes; Digital is a learning practice.

This is captured in the GDS Design Principles (https://www.gov.uk/design-principles) and more concisely in eBay's service design playbook (**Error! Reference ource not found.**). The feedback loop is vital, design is based on evidence, and the design process iterates over design ideas. Refining, and learning with each iteration.

### Digital has a different mind-set

Traditional services have often been defined by organisational hierarchy and departmental efficiency. Perhaps counter-intuitively, this local (departmental) optimisation leads to a sub-optimal service. The processes become fragmented to the customer, and handover points lead to inefficiencies. Digital, has a different mind-set, processes are designed from the outside-in. From the perspective of the customer, as opposed to the traditional inside-out view, where processes are designed from the departmental or functional perspective.

HOW WE MAKE DESIGN HAPPEN.

GO OUTSIDE
You can't design a great product without spending time in your customers' shoes. That's why we do our homework. We get out of the office and meet with our customers. We listen to them. And we listen some more, until we understand what matters to them.
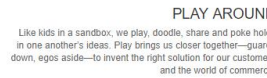
PLAY AROUND
Like kids in a sandbox, we play, doodle, share and poke holes in one another's ideas. Play brings us closer together—guards down, egos aside—to invent the right solution for our customers and the world of commerce.

MAKE SOMETHING
Design at eBay is serious work. It can be messy, complex, hard and sometimes, yes, disappointing. But that's all part of our creative process. How we birth great experiences and products our customers love and can use anywhere, anytime.

GET A REACTION
This is the moment of truth. We put our work out there to watch how people respond. Have we created something meaningful? Something people can use on any device? That makes their lives easier? Our biggest reward is often a smile.

KEEP GOING
Design is never truly finished. And that's part of the thrill. There's always another hurdle to clear, new solutions to discover, another chance to reimagine what you just created.

Figure 1: eBays service design playbook

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What this means for WDC

For WDC to develop a Digital First strategy, consideration will need to be given to the skills people need, the governance controls in place and the technology required to support the Digital processes.

When considering skills, there are "digital skills" and "skills for digital"[2]. Digital skills, are more focused on the use of technology, i.e. the skills required to use digital technology. A helpful framework is provided by the Tech Partnership. (https://www.thetechpartnership.com/basic-digital-skills/basic-digital-skills-framework).

Many will equate digital with Social Media, this narrow focus will often undermine confidence and can trivialise the skills people actually possess. The framework covers: Finding and managing information, Communicating, sharing and connecting, Transacting, Creating and Problem solving. Using this framework helps organisations and individuals to have a more structured conversation about their skill levels, even when people are relatively confident, use of the framework often helps provide a more rounded and positive view.

Skills for digital are required to design, develop, operate and evolve services within a Digital organisation. This includes skills around defining customer needs, customer engagement, typically agile project management and the skills for service evaluation. Usually, it is the skills for digital that organisations need to focus on whilst they develop their digital capability.

As developing digital services requires a more iterative approach, organisations require a governance model that provides a greater level of empowerment. Central to this model is a focus on agreed outcomes, clarity of design and architectural principles and a higher level of visibility of both the work in progress and, subsequently, the impact on services.

The impact of Digital on technology is significant, organisations need the right tools to support their ambitions. Organisations need to develop a Digital Platform on which they develop their Digital Services. The technology tends to be cloud-based (as it offers greater flexibility), is configurable without bespoke development (to ensure adaptability) and is designed with integration as a core requirement (to support automated end-to-end processes).

Once the broad characteristics of a Digital Organisation have been identified, it is helpful to consider where an organisation currently sits and where it's short and longer term aspirations are. There are several maturity models available, but no model is perfect. The value of a maturity model is that it acts as a tool to focus conversations and decision making, by helping to filter out noise, and to target evidence relevant to a state change in an organisation. This means that ultimately, a relatively simple model can be adopted so long as it is clear that the purpose of it is to shape the strategic conversation.

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[2] Eduserv, "Skills for digital change" http://www.eduserv.org.uk/insight/posts/2017/april/report-skills-for-digital-change/

Appendix B: Key Strands to a Digital Strategy

As we move towards defining the overall strategy for Digital First and the roadmap there are key strands that we will need to consider. The follow provides an overview of our current thinking.

The Digital Platform

A Digital Platform will be required to support the new digital processes. The platform will join together various technologies some will be existing, and others will require investment.

The platform will deliver a single view for the customer and provide the means to better manage data and the flow of data. The platform will also be used to deliver services and provide the digital processes that support the vision. To enable greater engagement with the community there will be tools that will scan and support access to social media channels that will mean we can act promptly as discussions gain momentum.

New Skills and Capabilities

We will need to develop new capabilities to deliver digital services. These will provide the communication, engagement and service design skills required to support the ambition. As demands change we will have developed the capabilities required to refine and develop new services. These capabilities will provide our digital independence and help futureproof our services.

Design Principles & Architecture

To guide IT spending and to deliver a coherent systems and data strategy we will require a core set of design principles and a central shared architecture. This will ensure we can deliver efficient end-to-end processes and support service areas as they start to consider new technologies or technology upgrades. By building an agreed single view on IT we will speed up decision making, which will be bound to a clear framework.

Empowerment and Collaboration

To speed up decision making and to enable us to be more proactive and fleet of foot we will need to focus on developing greater empowerment and collaboration. As an organisation, we work well together but need greater visibility and devolved decision making. This will require a review of governance processes, structure and resourcing.