

Sefton Council's Digital Strategy

Introduction.

Since the release of Sefton's Digital Strategy in 2021 technology has continued to advance at pace, bringing new opportunities to residents and businesses across Sefton.

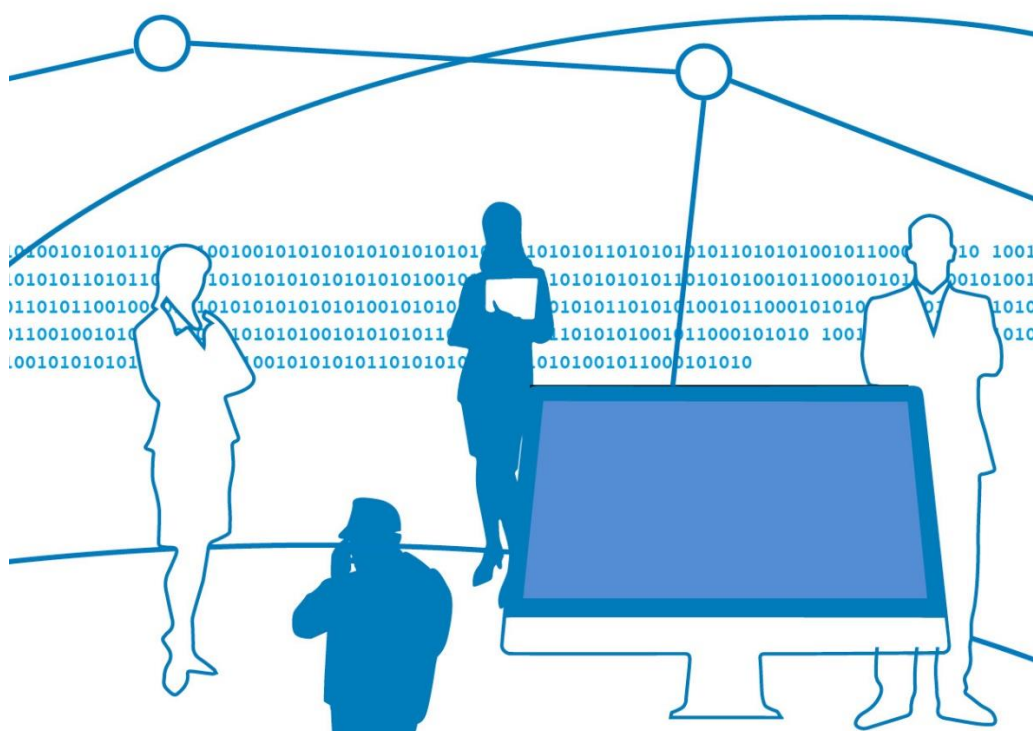
This updated strategy reflects on the progress we have made so far, sets out revised priorities and aims to ensure that Sefton develops as a digital place, with all communities, residents empowered to take advantages of the opportunities afforded by Digital.

Key to our ambitions are strong **digital foundations**, providing secure and robust connectivity across Sefton which reflects and supports our climate pledge as well as enabling and supporting business growth.

As a **Digital Council** we are continuing to develop our digital services, including how we work as a local authority, our information and advice delivered via our council website, and how residents can self-serve online to access services. As well as exploring how as an authority we can work more efficiently across partners to deliver joined up services that reflect the needs of our communities.

Key to developing Sefton as a **Digital Place** is our work around inclusion, that brings together all key partners to ensure that all residents, local partners, and businesses have access to digital skills, devices, and data.

In addition, the management of our **data and intelligence** is essential to proactively plan and deliver responsive services in line with demand, and transforming data into intelligence which is fundamental to service redesign ensuring we meet the requirements of all communities across Sefton.



What have we delivered since 2021?

Theme 1- Connected Council.

- All council staff have access to agile working KIT including, laptops and mobile phones as required, this access includes the provision of touch down spaces in office accommodation as well as support to work from home in line with service delivery requirements.
- Since 2021 the Council's New Ways of working programme has allow the authority to reduce its office footprint by 29%, with further opportunities being explored.
- Sefton has developed its Data and Intelligence tools, moving forwards with the development of a Data Warehouse, bringing together data to inform decision making service design and manage demand. This work has initially focused on supporting Children's Services with further plans in development across the Council.
- The Authority has migrated it's on-premises data centre to the Cloud, upgrading and improving this infrastructure as well as improving operational performance and resilience.
- A training and skills programme has been developed for internal staff to support the deployment digital tools across the Council.
- Gov - Roam has been deployed across office locations, facilitating the co-location of staff across Health and Social Care in line with the development of Integrated Care Teams
- A Cloud Telephony solution has been implemented which has significantly upgraded the Council's voice system as well as supporting agile and mobile working.
- The authority has developed a proactive approach to Cyber Security and participated in several external reviews to provide assurance in terms of the security of the Council's network and the personal data we process.

Theme 2 - Empowered Residents.

- Sefton has redesigned and relaunched its Corporate Website ensuring that it is easy to use and is in line with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines.
- The new Customer Experience Platform has been launched, providing improved self-service options for residents across the Sefton.
- A Digital Inclusion Partnership for Sefton is now established with an ambitious Digital Inclusion Strategy for residents launched in in 2022.
- Public devices across Sefton Libraries have been refreshed, and an enhanced offer is also provided in the form of a tablet loan scheme and a targeted databank service in some locations. Public Wi-Fi is also available across all libraries in the Borough.
- The TECS Strategy for Sefton (Technology Enabled Care Strategy) has been launched with a significant number of schemes in development or underway across Sefton, including partners.
- A digital skill and learning forum has been established bringing together representation from Schools, Colleges, the Council, and the wider Liverpool City region to ensure that digital training and education resources are developed and made available across Sefton.
- Sefton is working in partnership with the wider City Region to explore the opportunities afforded by the Internet of Things to develop a Smart Cities approach, discrete programmes are also underway across the borough including Air Quality Sensor deployment.

Theme 3 - Business Growth.

- Sefton has worked in partnership with Liverpool City Region colleagues (LCR Connect) during the build phase of the region's full fibre, ultrafast gigabit capable network.
- The authority is committed to working in partnership with the LCR Connect Team to expand mobile network coverage, including 5G across the Sefton.
- Free public Wi-Fi has been delivered within Bootle Strand
- Sefton has established a Digital Infrastructure Board to ensure alignment of all key digital programmes including Growth with the digital strategy.
- The authority has launched a dedicated Networking Group (Sefton Huddle) for all Digital, Creative and Tech industries located in the Sefton.

- A Digital skills survey developed and planned for release to all businesses, with appropriate follow up support in place.
- Sefton's Economic Forum in June 2023 included Digital innovation as a key theme and the Invest Sefton team has delivered workshops on digital sales & marketing and cyber resilience to Sefton businesses.
- Sefton Economic Strategy was approved by Cabinet on the 3rd November 2022, Digital is a key strand under the Social Inclusion and Access for all strategic objective.

Five Future Themes.

Throughout our work over the last two years the themes and priorities around digital have evolved, following consultation at both a regional and local level the revised five themes for Sefton are:

- Developing Sefton as Digital Place.
- Create strong Digital Foundations.
- Supporting an enhanced Customer Journey.
- To develop our Data and Intelligence.
- Support the Workforce of the Future.

Developing Sefton as a digital place.

Sefton Council is committed to ensuring that all residents and businesses are enabled to take advantage of the opportunities afforded by digital technologies.

Digital Inclusion and Digital Skills.

- We will work with key partners and agencies to deliver the [Sefton Residents Digital Inclusion strategy](#) to develop Sefton as a place where residents and organisations understand the benefits of digital, feel safe and confident online and are supported to develop their skills and thrive in an increasingly digital world.
- Over the last 12 month we have refreshed our publicly accessible machines across libraries, we plan to extend this further with virtual meeting pods, tablet loan schemes and the provision of a databank and device bank service, delivered in partnership with Good Things Foundation.
- We will continue to develop our approach to free access to public Wi-Fi in communal spaces as well as developing our network of Digital Champions to support people to get online.

- We aim to measure and gain greater understanding of who is accessing digital and where. So that we can obtain greater understanding of the barriers to digital participation across the Sefton place.
- To support our young people to be ready for the jobs of the future and create a local pipeline of skilled young people to meet the requirements of businesses across the Region.
- To support those seeking work to develop their digital skills and literacy in line with business demands.
- To ensure that online services provided by Sefton are meeting the needs of residents across the Sefton.

Digital Democracy.

- To explore options for digital democracy, including the ability to join a meeting virtually, to boost participation and as well as enhancing transparency.
- Provide training and guidance to elected members on Cyber Security so that they feel confident in communicating with residents via digital methods.

Business Growth.

The team in Sefton are committed to developing a strong economy that connects Sefton to the Liverpool City Region and beyond. Ensuring that all businesses across Sefton can benefit from high-speed internet connectivity and are empowered to leverage the opportunities afforded by digital technologies are a key foundation to this ambition. We will do this by:

- Support the delivery of the Liverpool City Region Full Fibre network and maximise the benefit of the regional investment for local businesses and residents.
- Continuing to develop and support our Creative, Digital and Tech Sector with the expansion of the popular Sefton Huddle business networking group, bringing together support and advice for these businesses along with the opportunity to develop local networks and peer support.
- Providing opportunities for any Sefton business to attend digital themed events and workshops, in venues across the Sefton. Where appropriate these sessions will be delivered in partnership with specialist agencies including the Northwest Cyber Resilience Operations Centre.

- Engage and support all Sefton businesses to develop their digital skills, firstly by understanding the requirements via a survey and using intelligence from this to connect business to local and national opportunities to ensure they can take advantage of the power of digital.
- Establishing a Digital Incubator Space within Southport, the Enterprise Arcade development will deliver a co-working space and community for our existing and future talent in this sector.
- Supporting the development of Bootle Strand into a community venue, providing free public Wi-Fi as well as access to digital learning resources onsite via the Sefton@work team.
- Supporting the delivery of access to digital learning resources in Southport with the provision of a permanent location for the Sefton at Work Team with the area.

Smart Cities.

Sefton continues to work in partnership with regional colleagues to explore opportunities to deploy smart technology across the place as appropriate, over the next few years we will:

- Learn from our adoption of Air Quality sensors and how such technologies can be linked to traffic flow management to reduce pollution across key areas of the Sefton.
- Embed Cyber resilience guidance for Smart Cities within our local governance.
- Consider the use of new technology to support safer communities, including a review of our existing CCTV infrastructure.
- Continue to explore opportunities at a regional level which meet the strategic aspirations for Sefton.

Developing Strong Digital Foundations.

Ensuring that Sefton has the core infrastructure and associated services in place to maximise the opportunities afforded by digital, including capitalising on existing investments to ensure value for money, the deliverables in this theme include:

Connectivity.

We will:

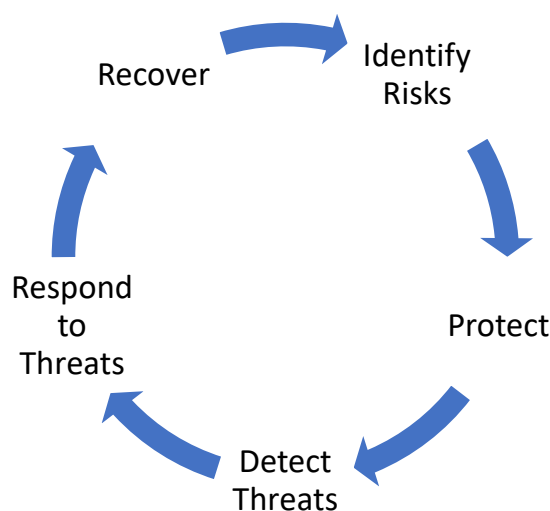
- To build upon the investment made in superfast full fibre across the Liverpool City Region and maximise the use of this network for the benefit of residents, local businesses and to improve connectivity across our public buildings.
- Continue to work in partnership with the wider Liverpool City Region on the deployment of next generation wireless technology to support the Smart Cities Programme including the deployment of 5G networks.

- Explore opportunities to utilise new services such as Gov Wi-Fi to further enhance solutions for integrated working.
- Establish a rolling upgrade programme of the Councils Wi-Fi Services to improve coverage across all Council buildings, including the provision of public access.
- Explore new solutions for Corporate Connectivity such as SDWAN. (Software Defined Wide Area Network)

Cyber Security.

To ensure that all digital services delivered are secure and in line with industry standards and best practice. Making sure that residents and business are confident that the information they share with us is safe, we pledge to:

- Continue to work in partnership with key agencies such as the National Cyber Security Centre, and regional partnerships to ensure we continually develop our cyber security standards in line with emerging threats.
- Continue to develop our cyber security approach and work in line with the following lifecycle.



Governance.

We pledge to be:

- Transparent around the way that the personal data of all residents is used and shared.
- We are committed to the safeguarding of privacy and will therefore ensure that robust information sharing agreements are in place with partners. There will be clear and accessible documentation around the way data is used, shared, and processed is available for all service areas.

Climate Emergency.

In 2019 Sefton declared a Climate Emergency and subsequently published its Climate Emergency Strategy, this Digital Strategy supports the ambitions by setting out the following objectives.

- To procure sustainable carbon neutral equipment where possible and include carbon reduction requirements within all ICT procurement documents.
- To explore innovative approaches to carbon reduction to achieve net zero.
- To explore options to support tracking and reporting of the carbon footprint to measure improvements.
- To be a cloud first authority with all new procurements being based on either SAAS (Software as a Service) services or provision within the Sefton Azure cloud architecture.

Technical Design.

- To have resilient, scalable, and sustainable systems hosted in an appropriate environment, adopting a Cloud First approach to the provisioning of applications, deploying multi cloud as appropriate.
- For all services and systems to be secure by design and in line with Zero Trust principles.
- The authority will adopt Government Digital Standards to ensure that all systems can speak to others as required, fulfilling the requirements of interoperability and integration as appropriate.
- All solutions will be device and internet browser agnostic, meaning that they should work on any Internet browser technology.
- The authority will seek to ensure best value, making use of government procurement frameworks where possible.

Supply chain management.

The authority is committed to ensuring that all suppliers to the council adhere to cyber security standards during the lifetime of their contracts, and to make sure this happens we will:

- Provide appropriate training and support for corporate procurement teams around Cyber Resilience across supply chains.
- Adopt national guidance around supply chain management.
- Set and implement minimum security standards for suppliers.
- Where appropriate the authority will implement continuous reviews of suppliers to identify and close out any vulnerabilities.

Supporting an Enhanced Customer Journey.

Sefton Council is committed to making sure that all residents can access services via a method most convenient for their needs (both on and offline), to support this we will:

- Continue to develop our information and advice services available on the Council Website, ensuring that it is easy to read, understand and meets all accessibility standards.
- Provide more options for residents to complete transactions at a time convenient to them, online 24 hours a day.
- Explore new technologies such as AI to enhance the customer experience both online, in person and via telephone.
- Ensure that new services are developed with the customer at the very centre of the experience to reduce unnecessary contact.

Data and Intelligence.

Data is one of our most valuable assets as a council and is helping to inform how we best design, deliver and transform our services to meet the needs of our communities, to improve outcomes for people in Sefton, and to drive efficiencies within current financial constraints.

Over the next three years we want empower our staff to transform data into intelligence by equipping them with the digital tools, skills, and training that they need to make better use of the information and data we collect to inform the delivery of core services and the ambitions within our Corporate Strategy.

Whilst changes are already happening across the council, with the implementation of a new enterprise data warehouse and the roll-out of the MS Power BI platform to ensure that we have the right technology and infrastructure for the future. So far the focus has been on ensuring continued service reporting, including compliance with national statutory performance reporting requirements, and developing new strategic and operational performance management reporting for Children's Services using interactive Power BI dashboards.

The next steps are to bring our BI and performance resources together; to bring our relevant data together into one place and then to combine and join this data together for data science purposes.

- Develop a culture that recognizes the importance of data science and data quality.
- Expand our data sharing arrangements with other organisations ensuring appropriate two way sharing to support service delivery.
- Build upon our established information governance framework and ethical standards for data processing.
- Develop our organisational data skills and knowledge.

To do this we will:

- Ensure that good quality relevant and timely data and business intelligence is embedded in everything that we do, is at the core of our decision-making and to inform and improve the services we provide to our residents.
- Enhance our reporting, analysis, and forecasting capability by bring together council resources into a single team and investing in business intelligence and data science to increase our data analysis and analytics capability.
- Maximise the opportunities presented by new technologies and infrastructure to enhance automation of operational reporting and focus increasingly on Business intelligence, making increased use of advanced data analysis techniques such as machine learning and data mining to derive greater insight and value from big data.
- Provide data in easy to use, accessible reports and dashboards by establishing a cloud-based data warehouse and adopting a common reporting platform (Power BI).
- Empower staff and develop the knowledge and data skills of our workforce.
- Democratise our data, making it accessible to all those that need it wherever practicable and appropriate, to aid better collaboration across the council and so we can all work more effectively and efficiently.
- Promote the provenance of our data, adopting the principle of using master data sets rather than duplication.
- Take pride in the quality of our data, and take responsibility to ensure it is accurate, complete, consistent, valid, unique, and relevant –particularly when entering data into systems.
- Make use of quality data from external sources, and work with our public sector partners to share data when it is appropriate to do so, to plan and shape the services that we provide and ultimately to enable us to deliver better outcomes.
- Build upon the established data governance arrangement to manage, utilise and care for our data throughout its lifecycle, including for its disposal and archiving where appropriate.
- Justify the collection, use and impact of data, ensuring that we use it ethically and respect people's privacy, making sure our data are secure and access to sensitive information is controlled via user permissions and appropriate governance.
- Procure interoperable systems which allow data to be linked, allowing deeper insights to be derived from our data.

- Provide open access to data wherever this is both possible and appropriate, allowing our communities to use this for furthering community resilience and outcomes.

Supporting the Workforce of the Future.

The staff within Sefton are our greatest asset and we are committed to supporting them to achieve their full potential and deliver great outcomes for the residents of the Sefton.

To do this we will:

- Equip our staff with appropriate devices and systems which will allow them to work effectively.
- Support hybrid/agile working where appropriate, to ensure colleagues achieve a healthy work life balance.
- Provide opportunities for training and development in both existing and new digital technologies.
- Develop the ICT Champions network to empower staff to take advantage of digital tools.
- Explore the use of new technologies such as robotics and AI to reduce the administrative burden and any duplication of effort across the workforce, thereby ensuring colleagues can focus on key service deliverables.
- Deploy digital technologies at scale to deliver the ambitions of Integrated Care ensuring that Adults, Children and Families within the Borough are informed, empowered, and supported to live safe and independent lives and fulfil their potential.
- Proactively support and develop IT systems and digital services to achieve the outcomes set out within our Children's Services Improvement Plan, improving outcomes for children and their families. Including.
- Delivery of ICT solutions to support SEND services.
- Review and redesign of the Case Management system supporting both Early Intervention, Statutory Children's Social Care and transition to Adult Services.
- Exploring the development and implementation of children's services online portals to allow parental engagement and further information transparency.
- To further develop financial systems to support service delivery.
- To ensure that all systems are supporting the statutory obligations of the Council as these develop nationally.

- Work in partnership with Health and Community care colleagues to deliver the Cheshire and Merseyside strategy for Digital Services across Integrated Care, including the delivery of a Shared Care Record.
- Support the delivery of the Adult Social Care strategy including the implementation of the [Technology Enabled Care Strategy](#)
- To support a review and redesign of Case Management Systems in line with Service redesign including support for Early Intervention Services.
- To further develop financial systems to support service delivery, including the provision of online financial assessments and financial management functionality for citizens.
- To develop online services for Adult Social Care, including launching a citizen self-assessment tool via the online portal.