In 2030, Sandwell is a thriving, optimistic and resilient community. It’s where we call home and where we’re proud to belong - where we choose to bring up our families, where we feel safe and cared for, enjoying good health, rewarding work, feeling connected and valued in our neighbourhoods and communities, confident in the future, and benefiting fully from a revitalised West Midlands.

**Ambition 1**
Sandwell is a community where our families have high aspirations and where we pride ourselves on equality of opportunity and on our adaptability and resilience.

**Ambition 2**
Sandwell is a place where we live healthy lives and live them for longer, and where those of us who are vulnerable feel respected and cared for.

**Ambition 3**
Our workforce and young people are skilled and talented, geared up to respond to changing business needs and to win rewarding jobs in a growing economy.

**Ambition 4**
Our children benefit from the best start in life and a high quality education throughout their school careers with outstanding support from their teachers and families.

**Ambition 5**
Our communities are built on mutual respect and taking care of each other, supported by all the agencies that ensure we feel safe and protected in our homes and local neighbourhoods.

**Ambition 6**
We have excellent and affordable public transport that connects us to all local centres and to jobs in Birmingham, Wolverhampton, the airport and the wider West Midlands.

**Ambition 7**
We now have many new homes to meet a full range of housing needs in attractive neighbourhoods and close to key transport routes.

**Ambition 8**
Our distinctive towns and neighbourhoods are successful centres of community life, leisure and entertainment where people increasingly choose to bring up their families.

**Ambition 9**
Sandwell has become a location of choice for industries of the future where the local economy and high performing companies continue to grow.

**Ambition 10**
Sandwell now has a national reputation for getting things done, where all local partners are focused on what really matters in people’s lives and communities.
Having digital skills is essential in our modern world. As the trend for products and services moving online continues the world becomes more digitally dependent with 90% of jobs requiring digital skills.

Digital technology is in every aspect of our home and work life. It continues to change the way we communicate and go about our day. To take advantage of the internet, or even undertake the simplest online task requires skills. Sandwell’s use of basic digital skills is the lowest percentage across the Black Country at only 30%.

Our challenge in Sandwell is to make the best use of technology to improve people’s lives, whether through enjoying new skills, finding a job, maintaining contact with family or having access to a wider range of easy to use services, ensuring no one is left behind.

Councillor Steve Trow – Cabinet Member for Core Services

I see Digital Transformation as a key priority for Sandwell. We want to be digital by default in whatever we do. This will enable an agile workforce and present opportunities to deliver services in different, innovative ways.

Digital will also enable us to transform and modernise how and where we work. We will be able to modernise office space providing better collaborative environments for our workforce and enable flexible working improving work/life balance.

It is important that the outcomes in this strategy do not just focus on service delivery and our workforce. They also aim to deliver real benefits to our citizens by supporting them to learn new digital skills so that they can benefit from the opportunities digital inclusion brings.

Darren Carter - Executive Director of Resources
This is a new strategy for Sandwell and one that will bring about significant transformation of services. It has been developed in consultation with the community and our workforce. It demonstrates in a non-technical way Sandwell’s high level vision, principles and ambitions for Digital Transformation. Underpinned by the ICT Strategy, the focus of our Digital Strategy isn’t just about developing digital services, it’s about putting residents at the heart and delivering better outcomes.

Over the past 2 years our knowledge and understanding of what can be achieved through digital transformation has grown and we are now starting to see real positive outcomes for the people of Sandwell and our workforce. We have used this knowledge and experience to help shape the strategy.

Digital is now a part of everyday life and we will seek to bring about efficiencies in working practices and automate processes wherever possible. Our co-design ethos will ensure we understand what matters most to Sandwell’s residents when transforming services.

Consultation with the community, has been a crucial stage in the development of this strategy. It allowed us to recognise and appreciate the important role that we have as a Council in addressing social isolation and social exclusion as it is clear that this can be compounded when implementing digital services. We have ensured that this strategy therefore supports social integration.

Sue Knowles - Head of ICT, Digital and Revenues and Benefits
Vision and Purpose of our Digital Strategy

Our Digital Strategy provides clear focus for how we will best use technology to deliver better outcomes for people, rather than the information systems and technology that underpin delivery. The strategy puts inclusion at the centre of Digital Sandwell both in its development and delivery.

This strategy sets out:

- **4 Strategic Outcomes**: This is what the service will aim for to add value and improve effectiveness across all Council services.

- **3 Key Themes**: These will be our primary areas of focus and will help us to successfully deliver the strategic outcomes.

- **5 Guiding Principles**: These will be used to support decision making and ensure needs and opportunities will be prioritised to deliver maximum benefits for the whole council and for the people of Sandwell.
Digital Strategic Outcomes

Transformation of Services
- Extensively adopt digital tools, solutions and processes into service delivery models to make better services and ensure best value for money.

Organisation Fit for Future
- A digital culture across the organisation and its partners that shapes process, policy and the way we think, behave and communicate.

Skills, Confidence and Trust
- Inspire confidence and trust in digital services, increasing digital skills and usage for our community, businesses and workforce.

Digital Communities supporting Social Inclusion
- Engaged and self-supporting communities using digital tools to help themselves and each other at home and in places that reduce social isolation.

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Digital Communities supporting Social Inclusion
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Engagement with our Workforce

Our Digital Strategy builds on great examples of work that we are already doing. We’ve gained views of those working in these areas to ensure our strategy captures the digital ambitions of our workforce.

“Work hard to breakdown departmental barriers”

“We should look to automate more in back offices to support achieving efficiencies and a paperless office”

“Use data to support making decisions and setting priorities that best help people”

“Make online services easy to use”

“Make more around wider digital projects and community development”

“Develop MySandwell to be the primary source of contact, adding more of what people want”

“Digital is the way of the world - we need to upskill residents not just in accessing council services but in all areas of their lives”

“maximise on the significant investment in digital infrastructure within our libraries – and build upon the substantial offering already provided”

“We should ensure our service design and technology makes it easier not harder for voluntary sector partners and community groups to support people”
Community Engagement

Feedback from our community and voluntary organisations has helped us to shape our strategy and capture the digital ambitions of our people. In the heart of our community we are assured they represent the current and future needs of the people of Sandwell, catering for those ready to exploit digital and those that need support in a digital world.

“Kit is often expensive and children have better equipment in schools than at home so parents struggle with the inconsistency, parents struggle to keep up with the technology children experience in schools”

“There is a need for improved access to the technology, internet and equipment, both at home and in and around the borough”

“Digital has an impact on social inclusion and isolation, highlighting the importance of not isolating communities”

“Residents want to get out of the house and see other people to overcome loneliness and not necessarily access IT in their own home”

“There is limited English within our community and this is leading to a lack of confidence with IT and going online”

“Organisations want support with recruiting volunteers and support in training volunteers to aid digital in their organisations to help residents”

“Address the assistance needed by those in the Bangladeshi community, the demand for help exceeds the capacity of volunteers”
Over the past 2 years our knowledge and understanding of what can be achieved through digital transformation has grown and we are now starting to see real positive outcomes for the people of Sandwell and our workforce. We now know what we need to do more of and this has helped shape the strategy.

**Third sector and community demand for digital is clear**
Supporting the third sector with even the smallest grants to create their own digital community projects is resulting in sustainable communities who are now passing the digital knowledge and support gained to communities within the borough.
We recognise the value our residents place on these projects and the genuine benefits of increasing aspirations and ambitions for employability, educational and economic status that they bring so will do more to support third sector.

**Address social isolation when implementing digital services**
We’ve learned that addressing community concerns around the impact digital has on social inclusion and isolation is critical. Our digital services will recognise the importance of not isolating communities; residents want to get out of the house and see other people to overcome loneliness and not necessarily access IT in their own home and we’ll ensure our service design reflects this.

**It’s not all about the technology**
To make sure transformation is truly for everyone, we need to provide more than just access.
Over 88,000 people are using digital skills to enjoy access to many online council services. Making something simple and easy to use is hard work but we’ll continue to do the behind the scenes complex designs and most importantly, robustly challenge to drive out unnecessary steps as we understand the easier we make it, the more people can benefit.

**Digital transformation requires holistic change**
Growing skills gaps puts our transformation efforts at risk and we recognise that digital transformation requires holistic change; we need to transform technology and people - starting with our workforce. We will do more to address skill levels within our workforce, supporting the use of technologies and engaging them in change to deliver services in different, innovative ways which are crucial to the delivery of our ambitious Vision 2030.
Key Digital Transformation Themes

To turn our strategy into reality we have identified three key themes that will ensure we focus on the things that will help us to achieve our strategic outcomes and support delivery of Sandwell’s Vision 2030.

**Theme 1: Digital By Default Workforce**
Freed up to work on what matters most and skilled with easy ways to communicate and collaborate, our workforce will see change in how work is organised, the type of work they do, and when and where people work.

**Theme 2: Access to Services**
Our partners and communities will have greater access to a wider range of easy to use, much more efficient services, provided and accessed in a way that is relevant and effective for their needs.

**Theme 3: Digital Inclusion**
Our communities will enjoy more skills, motivation and trust in technology with value spreading beyond the practicalities and into wider issues such as social exclusion, loneliness and isolation.
Theme 1: Digital by Default Workforce

Objective

• Freed up to work on what matters most and skilled with easy ways to communicate and collaborate, our workforce will see change in how work is organised, the type of work we do, and when and where people work.

We will:

• Work collaboratively with our workforce and partners to understand the requirements of services, articulating how technology can improve and deliver these more efficiently - exploring the “art of the possible”
• Exploit our investment in tools and platforms to make the most use of the functionality and capability of our existing systems
• Support the Council’s Work Place Vision programme by providing the right tools and management processes for a paperless environment
• Focus on process efficiency and automation, simplifying processes and systems for the benefit of end users
• Ensure our workforce has the digital skills to adopt a digital first approach to working collaboratively across boundaries to deliver services and meet customer needs
• Address gaps in digital skills and confidence by providing support for training and skills transfer to deliver an empowered digital workforce
Theme 2: Access to Services

Objective
• Our partners and communities will have greater access to a wider range of easy to use, much more efficient services, provided and accessed in a way that is relevant and effective for their needs.

We will:
• Understand how and why people access services and make improvements that focus both on self-service opportunity and development of assisted digital services for those who need support and people with disabilities.
• Provide simple options for those who are socially and economically excluded to get online
• Continue to add a wide range of easy to use, efficient services to the MySandwell Customer Portal, making it easier for more people to access better services
• Explore using new technology and channels for businesses and partners
• Provide a well-managed roll out programme with resource focussed to making the greatest impact
• Grow the in-house skills of our digital developers to exploit our digital platforms and make the most use of the functionality and capability
• Facilitate end to end process re-engineering including Lean challenge to ensure processes are user friendly
Theme 3: Digital Inclusion

Objective

- Our communities will enjoy more skills, motivation and trust in technology with value spreading beyond the practicalities and into wider issues such as social exclusion, loneliness and isolation.

We will:

- Bring digital into people's lives in a way that benefits them; helping them do things they care about and can gather a broader set of information and resources to make better-informed choices.
- Ensure all our access channels and services support vulnerable people in our communities to live their lives well; providing digital opportunities that support social interaction, participation in the community, and wider participatory activities.
- Support our people to fulfil their potential by signposting to voluntary sector partners for digital support and training, working collaboratively with the sector to access funding opportunities and improve digital skills and literacy.
- Work to develop the skills of our community organisations to enable them to provide a greater level of digital support.
- Inform and educate people to help them move to new ways of accessing council and online services.
- Ensure we are meeting local needs by developing partnerships that focus us on what matters most.
Guiding Delivery Principles

These principles, incorporating Government Digital Service and LocalGov Digital standards will be used to support decision making and ensure needs and opportunities will be prioritised to deliver maximum benefits for the whole council and for the people of Sandwell

**Principle 1:**
Start with community needs not our own

**Principle 2:**
Work together

**Principle 3:**
Provide support

**Principle 4:**
Make it simple, easy and better

**Principle 5:**
Be data driven
**Principle 1 – Start with community needs not our own**

We must ensure our designs and decisions satisfy community needs to get the right outcome for them

**Rationale:**
- The use of digital technologies and services must add value to the community, whether an employee, elected member, citizen, business or partner organisation
- Technology should be easy to use and accessible to the community users so they make it their channel of choice
- There is a direct correlation between digital exclusion and social exclusion
- Quality must be assessed from the user’s point of view, customer satisfaction is a key measure
- People need tailored support to help them overcome their own barriers; whether that’s around access, cost, confidence or skills.

**Benefit:**
- Increases users trust
- Cost to serve decreases as more people choose to self-serve
- Decreased support costs as services are simple and intuitive and require no/minimal training
- Digital access and skills support our most vulnerable to be socially included
- Increase customer satisfaction
- Increasing the number who can appreciate the benefits of digital
Rationale:

• Co-design is key to involving a range of stakeholders, particularly community users, in needs assessment and service design
• Tapping into the diverse talent pool including our volunteers, third sector and businesses we can add capacity to develop digital confidence
• Provide value for money by simplifying services and adopting common business processes
• Building mutually beneficial partnership opens access to capability, capacity, experience and innovation that will enable us to meet changing service needs
• Recognise that designing easy to use services that our community need is complex, requiring collaboration from all areas of the business

Benefit:

• Co-design helps us to test assumptions that we may have about how well (or otherwise) solutions might work
• Opportunity to explore a range of targeted initiatives involving council services, commissioned providers and support groups
• Opportunity to access larger funders
• Shared knowledge to assist with future support
• Partnerships will allow us to adopt new and innovative shared technologies with partners and other service providers to ensure convenient face-to-face access for those who need it
• Offers additional opportunity to network and learn from each other
Principle 3 – Provide Support

Address the digital divide between those who are confident in a digital world and those who are not, providing space, opportunity and support

Rationale:
- New technologies can compound social exclusion of the most vulnerable groups
- Many people are missing out on the opportunities the digital world offers, whether through lack of connectivity, digital skills or motivation
- Many jobs have a digital element, with 90% of all jobs requiring some element of digital skills
- Providing effective digital skills is essential to ensure the community and our workforce is prepared for this and future technological changes
- Opportunity for the interests of the community to help set the agenda for what they learn

Benefit:
- Developing in-house talent, up-skilling our workforce and developing community skills will help us become fit for future
- Increased easy access to wide ranging online services such as accessing health and wellbeing information, financial support, cheaper services and keep in-touch with family and friends will help reduce longer term pressures on council services
- Future generations will have fair access to jobs and opportunities and Sandwell has a skilled and capable workforce
- Make it easier for support and funding to reach organisations who can offer the best support to people offline
Principle 4 – Make it simple, easy and better

Ensure we do the hard work to make things simple in the design and delivery of processes and services across all channels

Rationale:
• This is what we mean when we say service transformation, we can't continue delivering services using paper forms or old fashioned, inflexible systems built up over decades
• Making something simple and easy to use is hard work - behind the scenes complex designs but most important, robust challenge to drive out unnecessary steps
• It’s not just about hardware and software that makes things happen, it’s thinking about the whole service and transforming the experience for users
• As more customers take advantage of self-service our telephony and face to face customer profile will change, resulting in more complex, lengthy enquiries as simple transaction are done online

Benefit:
• Easy to access and easy to use services
• Builds confidence in using digital technologies
• Reduced demands on our workforce and improve performance
• Service delivery can be forecast and planned around the more complex retained services
• Creating capacity so resources can be redirected to ensuring vulnerable people get the support they require
• Consistent, straight forward customer experience across whole customer journey
Principle 5 – Be data driven

Directing energy towards the greatest impact for our people using data at the heart of our decisions

**Rationale:**
- When an initiative is data driven, quality information is available to the right people when they need it and realistic impact can be assessed.
- As resources become more and more in demand, prioritisation becomes more critical and data provides rationale for decisions.
- Data offers a more complete picture of the organisation so that decisions aren’t made based on only one perspective, but with a more holistic view.
- Encourages a culture of being flexible and open to sharing where we can measure and learn.
- A commitment to moving towards the creation / sharing / use of more Open Data to better inform decision-making.

**Benefit:**
- Data can provide a good benchmark for the workforce to connect their actions to results.
- Data will reveal new opportunities for improvement.
- Leads to accelerated impact if used for decision making.
- Ability to identify trends over time which can inform effective practice and service design.
- Data supports outcome based performance management.
- Data provides us with early indication of future service pressures.
- Allows us to improve frequently.
Future State

Digital transformation will be improving the effectiveness and efficiency of internal ways of working within a “think digital” culture.

Office space is being rationalised and transformed as employees embrace agile working.

Technology will be supporting front line services across all channels, whilst users confidently enjoy better, wide ranging services.

Through strengthened partnership working we will be engaging larger funders, bringing new money and resources into the region to decrease the digital usage and skills gap and ensuring sustainability.

Communities engaged in setting the future strategy and digital priorities supporting social and digital inclusion.