



**MINUTES of  
STRATEGY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE  
13 JUNE 2024**

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**PRESENT**

Chairperson	Councillor M F L Durham, CC
Vice-Chairperson	Councillor J Driver
Councillors	A Fittock, A S Fluker, K M H Lagan, A M Lay, R H Siddall, N D Spenceley, W Stamp, CC and M E Thompson
In attendance	Councillor(s) P L Spenceley and J C Stilts

**88. CHAIRPERSON'S NOTICES**

The Chairperson welcomed everyone to the meeting and went through some general housekeeping arrangements for the meeting.

**89. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

There were none.

**90. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING**

**RESOLVED**

- (i) that the Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 14 March 2024 be received.

**Minute No. 660 – Budgetary Control as at 31 December 2023**

It was noted that reference to stake park on page 7 of the agenda pack should read *skate* park.

In response to a query regarding resolution (iv) of this Minute and the further detail requested in respect of the invest to save business case for the fixed-term IT Specialist role, the Chief Finance Officer confirmed that the information was still outstanding. It was agreed that this would be brought back to the next meeting of the Committee for noting.\*

**RESOLVED**

- (ii) that subject to the above amendment the Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 14 March 2024 be confirmed.

\*Postscript note: It was clarified later in the meeting that the IT Specialist Role was no longer required and therefore the funding would remain in the Transformation Reserve

(see Agenda Item 8 - Technology Strategy 2024 – 2027). Therefore, there was no need to report anything further back at the next meeting.

#### **91. DISCLOSURE OF INTEREST**

There were none.

#### **92. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

No requests had been received.

#### **93. COUNCIL TAX EMPTY HOMES PREMIUM POLICY REVISION**

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Finance Officer informing Members of a delay to legislative provisions to increase the period of time before which Council Tax premium would become payable in certain circumstances. The report also sought consideration of whether the previously agreed Policy on Empty Homes Premiums should be amended to enable these provisions to be applied locally in advance of legislation being made.

The report provided background information regarding the Council's prior agreement of the Empty Homes and Second Homes Premium Policy 2024 – 25 to enable the application of Council Tax premiums in respect of long-term empty homes after a period 12 months and from 1 April 2025 for second homes. At the time of approval Government guidance on exceptions to the premium was outstanding, this had since been received and the exceptions were set out in the report. A revised Policy was attached at Appendix A to the report.

In response to a question regarding the process followed when the Council received information about empty homes, the Assistant Director – Service Delivery outlined the process to confirm if a property constitutes an empty property, which included visits to the property if required and how once systems were updated this would automatically trigger the Council Tax premium at the appropriate time. She confirmed that the Council sought to deal with the receipt of such information as quickly as possible.

Councillor R H Siddall proposed that the recommendations set out in the report be agreed. This was duly seconded and agreed.

#### **RECOMMENDED**

- (i) That provision is made for an extension to the time before which a Council Tax premium becomes due in some limited circumstances, effective from 1 April 2024 until further guidance is issued or enabling legislation is made;
- (ii) that the revised Empty Homes and Second Homes Premium Policy 2024 - 25 at **APPENDIX 1** to these Minutes, be approved;
- (iii) that the Head of Revenues and Benefits be granted delegated authority, in consultation with the Chairperson of the Strategy and Resources Committee, to make further technical amendments, to reflect updated guidance, as necessary.

#### **94. PROJECT AND IMPROVEMENT MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK AND MALDON DISTRICT COUNCIL PRODUCTIVITY PLAN**

The Committee considered the report of the Director of Strategy and Resources providing the Corporate Project Management Office (PMO) and Improvement Framework (the Framework), attached as Appendix 1 to the report, for review and adoption. As requested by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) the report also provided a Productivity Plan (attached as Appendix 2) for review and adoption.

Members were advised of the recent requirement from the DLUHC that Councils produce Productivity Plans as part of the Local Government Finance Settlement and the report outlined the requirements for Productivity Plans.

The Council's Process Improvement Framework (Appendix 1) had been updated and built on learning and achievements of the last three years of activity of the previous Strategy. It also now included project management activity and contributing a staffing reduction. The Framework activity linked to the Data Management and Insight Strategy and Technology Strategy, which together then formed the basis for the Council's Productivity Plan (Appendix 2).

In response to a query regarding the appointment of Member Improvement Champions, the Assistant Director – Programmes, Performance and Governance confirmed that appointment of these Member champions was on an annual basis and would be sought from the Performance, Governance & Audit and Overview & Scrutiny Committees at their first meetings of the municipal year.

Councillor N D Spenceley proposed that the recommendations set out in the report be agreed. This was duly seconded and agreed. Councillor K M H Lagan asked that his dissent be noted.

#### **RESOLVED**

- (i) That the Project Management Office (PMO) and Improvement Strategic Framework (Appendix 1 to the report) be adopted;
- (ii) That the Committee approves the 'Productivity Plan' at Appendix 2 to the report and receives a six-monthly update on this going forwards.

#### **95. TECHNOLOGY STRATEGY 2024 - 2027**

The Committee considered the report of the Director of Strategy and Resources seeking the Council's approval of the Technology Strategy 2024 – 2027 (attached as Appendix 1 to the report) (the Strategy).

It was noted that the Technology Strategy defined how the Council would use technology and transform the way it worked digitally and would be a key component of the Council's Productivity Plan, an expectation of the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. The Strategy comprised of four priorities, set out in the report and aligned with the Council's Corporate Plan 2024 – 2027.

In response to a request for in depth Member training to assist Members in understanding technology, the Assistant Director – Resources advised that regular sessions were being held with Members prior to Council meetings. The Leader of the Council clarified that should Members wish these to take place at a different time this could be considered by the Member Training Working Group.

During the debate that ensued and in response to a number of questions and queries the following information was provided by Officers:

- the Assistant Director clarified that in respect of disposal of old IT equipment the Council's Policy required that such equipment was first offered to Parish / Town Councils, following this the Council would try to sell the equipment. She highlighted the cost of disposal to the Council as such devices required all data to be wiped prior to repurposing, however interest had been received from a local company which repurposed devices for schools.
- The Technology Strategy looked at the Council's resources and what it wanted to achieve within the lifetime of the Strategy, three years in the case of this document. The use of Artificial Intelligence was detailed within the Strategy, although Officers confirmed that future Strategies would build on this. The Leader advised that the Council was working in partnership with other Councils across Essex in terms of investing in technology and developing a shared approach.
- The Strategy would maintain current resources and budget with an aim to save and reduce budgets. It was noted that working in partnership with the Essex Digital Partnership would provide the Council with more capacity than if it was carrying out the work itself.

During the discussion the Chief Finance Officer referred back to the Minutes of the last meeting and Minute No. 660 – Budgetary Control as at 31 December 2023 and specifically resolution (iii) where the Committee agreed a drawdown from the Transformation Reserve for a two-year extension of a fixed-term IT specialist role. She reported that since that meeting it had been clarified that this role was no longer required and therefore, the investment requested was not required. The Director of Strategy and Resources apologised that this had not been reported back to Members.

Councillor R H Siddall proposed that the recommendation set out in the report be agreed. This was duly seconded and agreed.

**RECOMMENDED** that the Technology Strategy 2024 – 2027 (**APPENDIX 2** to these Minutes) be approved to replace the ICT Strategy 2021 – 2026 and run along the Corporate Plan 2024 – 2027.

## **96. PLANNING POLICY WORKING GROUP**

Councillor K M H Lagan, Chairperson of the Planning Policy Working Group (the Working Group), presented the report of the Working Group, which provided an annual update on the work carried out by the Planning Policy Working Group during 2023 / 24. He reassured the Committee that the Working Group had, at its last meeting, discussed the involvement and input of more Members to ensure better input and understanding.

During the discussions that followed Councillor Lagan along with Officers provided the Committee with additional information which included:

- The Working Group had requested a more detailed plan on a regular basis.
- There were no direct actions points outstanding.
- New Policies were being written and the Leader confirmed it had been agreed that briefings would take place in the summer to ensure all Members were kept up to date with progress. The Director of Service Delivery advised that diary dates for these briefings would follow shortly.

- In response to a comment regarding pepper potting, Officers explained that the Council had previously decided not to do this. In respect of housing numbers and the Local Development Plan, it was confirmed that a briefing for Members would be arranged at the appropriate time.

During the discussions, Councillor W Stamp declared an interest as an Essex County Councillor.

The importance of regular updates and for Members to fully understand the process was noted.

Members were reminded that all agenda and Minutes of the Working Group were available to view via the Mod.Gov system.

**RESOLVED** that the content of the report be received.

## 97. **APPOINTMENT OF REPRESENTATIVES ON OUTSIDE BODIES AND WORKING GROUPS**

The Committee considered the report of the Director of Strategy and Resources to appoint to Outside Bodies and Working Groups of the Strategy and Resources Committee for the ensuing municipal year.

The Chairperson called for nominations and the following was agreed.

### **RESOLVED**

- (i) That representatives of the Strategy and Resources Committee are appointed to the Outside Bodies as detailed below, for the ensuing Municipal Year;

<b>Outside Body</b>	<b>2024 / 25 Representatives</b>
Maldon Museum in the Park Liaison Committee	Councillors K M H Lagan and A M Lay
Maldon Citizens Advice Bureau Liaison Committee	Councillors A Fittock, N D Spenceley and M E Thompson

- (ii) That representatives of the Strategy and Resources Committee are appointed to the Working Groups as detailed below, for the ensuing Municipal Year.

<b>Working Groups</b>	<b>2024 / 25 Representatives</b>
Car Parking Task and Finish Working Group	Councillors J Driver, M F L Durham CC, A M Lay and W Stamp CC
Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Officer Working Group	Councillors R H Siddall and M E Thompson
Waste Contract Member Working Group	Councillors M F L Durham CC, A S Fluker, K M H Lagan and R H Siddall

## 98. **ANY OTHER ITEMS OF BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE COMMITTEE DECIDES ARE URGENT**

The Chairperson announced that in accordance with Section 100b(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 he had agreed to allow the Chief Finance Officer to raise an urgent item of business.

**99. APPROVAL TO CARRY FORWARD CAPITAL FUNDING FOR THE GALLEON REPLACEMENT FROM 2023 / 24**

The Committee considered the urgent report of the Chief Finance Officer seeking Members' agreement to carry forward the previously agreed capital budget of £226,000 from 2023 / 24 to 2024 / 25, to enable delivery of the Galleon play equipment replacement project to proceed at pace. It was noted that this matter was brought forward as an urgent item for consideration as the full list of 2023 / 24 carryforwards was not due to be considered by this Committee until 25 July 2024; however, in order to deliver this project within the planned timescale of 18 October 2024 it was necessary to place an order with the contractor by Monday 17 June 2024.

The report provided background information regarding the Galleon play equipment replacement project and the related timescales for delivery. In response to a question the Chief Finance Officer advised that the project was in place and planning permission had been sought, this request was to enable the funding to continue for delivery of the project.

Councillor A S Fluker proposed that the recommendation as set out in the report be agreed. This was duly agreed.

**RESOLVED** the 2023 / 24 capital funding of £226,000 allocated for the delivery of the Galleon Project be carried forward to 2024 / 25.

**100. EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS**

In response to a query regarding Agenda Item 13 – Authority to Write Off Unrecoverable Debt and why it was not being discussed in open business, Officers confirmed that the details relating to this specific case were not in the public domain and therefore considered private and confidential. Officers confirmed that other such cases had also been treated in this way. It was suggested that for future reference, standard guidance on such matters be obtained from the Monitoring Officer.

The Chairperson moved the recommendation which was duly seconded and agreed. Councillor A S Fluker requested that his dissent be noted.

**RESOLVED** that under Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972 the public be excluded from the meeting for the following item(s) of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 1, 2 and 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Act, and that this satisfies the public interest test.

**101. AUTHORITY TO WRITE OFF UNRECOVERABLE DEBT**

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Finance Officer seeking Members' approval to write off debt which exceeded the officer delegation limit of £10,000.

The report provided detailed information regarding outstanding debt in relation to an overpayment of Housing Benefit and Council Tax support and the action undertaken by the Council to recover these monies to date. It was noted that following a bankruptcy order this debt was no longer recoverable and therefore write off was sought.

In response to a query regarding the officer delegation limit of £10,000 Members were advised that this was set out in the Council's Constitution and could be reviewed in the future, if required.

Councillor K M H Lagan proposed that the recommendation set out in the report be agreed. This was duly seconded and agreed. Councillor W Stamp asked that her dissent be recorded.

**RESOLVED** the write off totalling £17,035.82, broken down into £15,268.52 overpaid Housing Benefit and £1,767.31 Council Tax, be approved, due to the debt not being recoverable following a bankruptcy order.

## **102. PROCUREMENT OF SERVICES**

The Committee considered the report of the Director of Service Delivery seeking approval to procure and award a contract as set out in the report. Members' agreement was also sought to grant the Director of Service Delivery delegated authority in consultation with the Chairperson of the Committee to award the contract upon receipt of bids and following full evaluation.

The report provided background information regarding the current contract and the request to retender the contract to ensure best value for money was achieved. A procurement process would be undertaken following consultation with internal stakeholders and following specific guidance to ensure required standards were met. The report detailed the proposed procurement process timetable.

Following presentation of the report by the Head of Environmental Health, Waste and Climate Action, Councillor R H Siddall referred to the size of the contract and proposed that recommendation (iv) be amended removing the delegation and instead forming a Task and Finish Working Group made up of himself, the Chairperson of this Committee and two other Members of this Committee to be involved in the decision making process reporting back to this Committee. This proposal was duly seconded. Councillor Siddall then proposed that Councillor N D Spenceley and W Stamp be the other two Members on the Working Group.

The Chairperson clarified that the proposal was to amend recommendation (iv) to create a Task and Finish Working Group which would report back to this Committee. Councillor Siddall then proposed that the recommendations as amended be agreed. This was duly seconded and agreed.

### **RESOLVED**

- (i) That the Council does not exercise its option to extend the contract (set out in the report) and follows the notice and procurement process as detailed in the report;
- (ii) That a Member Task and Finish Working Group with a Membership of Councillors M F L Durham CC (Chairperson of this Committee), R H Siddall (Leader of the Council), N D Spenceley and W Stamp be formed to consider award of the Contract (as detailed in (i) above) and to make recommendations to the Strategy and Resources Committee for decision and award of the contract.

## **103. PROPOSED CONTRACT EXTENSION**

The Committee considered the report of the Director of Service Delivery seeking Members' approval to extend the Advice Services Contract, as set out in the report, for a further three years to September 2027.



Members noted the original award of the contract was for three years with the option to extend the contract for a further three years.

The report provided information regarding the direct levels of funding for the contract, the service provided to residents, performance, and outcomes. It was noted the contract was managed by the Assistant Director – Customer Services and Operations with scrutiny from a six-monthly joint Member and Officer Contract Liaison meeting. The vital service provided by the contract particularly at the current times was highlighted.

Following presentation of the report by the Assistant Director, Councillor A S Fluker referred to the recommendation and proposed that this be a recommendation to the Council.

Councillor K M H Lagan proposed that the recommendations as set out in the report be agreed. This proposal was duly seconded.

In response to a comment regarding the contract, the Chief Finance Officer advised that the contract was RPI linked and would therefore go up with this. It was therefore agreed that recommendation (ii) be amended to read “that funding recommendations remain unchanged”.

Councillor Fluker withdrew his earlier proposition at this point.

The Chairperson moved the recommendations as amended. This was duly seconded and agreed.

## **RESOLVED**

- (i) That the current Advice Services Contract is extended for a further three years to September 2027,
- (ii) That funding recommendations remains unchanged;
- (iii) That Members note the significant positive outcomes being delivered under the current contract.

## **104. SPLASH PARK OPERATIONS 2024**

The Commercial Manager gave a verbal update on Splash Park Operation 2024 following a decision made by this Committee in February 2024 to open the Splash Park as per scenario 1 (as detailed in the report). He offered apologies to Members, specifically mentioning Councillor K M H Lagan, for a misinterpretation of the decision and subsequent instruction to the contractors.

The Chairperson thanked the Commercial Manager and proposed that the apology ended the matter.

The Director of Strategy and Resources added an apology from the Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) and confirmed that the process was back on track with the Splash Park opening the following day (14 June 2024).

The Head of Service Delivery reported that the Directors and Section 151 Officer would be referring this as a CLT matter to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (O&S) for consideration in due course. There was some discussion regarding this, and Members



advised that the matter would be considered by the O&S Working Group who would decide if the matter was taken forward.

During the short discussion that followed, a number of Members commented, Councillor Lagan thanked the Officer and CLT for the apology, and Officers provided Members with additional information including changes already introduced by officers.

The Chairperson then declared that the matter was closed.

There being no other items of business the Chairperson closed the meeting at 9.20 pm.

M F L DURHAM, CC  
CHAIRPERSON



MALDON DISTRICT COUNCIL

# **Empty Homes and Second Homes Premium Policy 2024-25**

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# 1. Introduction and background

- 1.1 The following policy outlines the Council's approach to the levying of empty homes premium and second homes premiums.
- 1.2 Premiums were introduced by government from 1 April 2013 with a view to encouraging homeowners to occupy homes and not leave them vacant in the long term.
- 1.3 The legislation which introduced premiums is S11B of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 (inserted by the Local Government Finance Act 2012). Premiums could only be charged on long-term empty dwellings. An empty dwelling is one which is 'unoccupied' and 'substantially unfurnished'. The definition of 'long-term' is where the dwelling has been empty for a continuous period of at least 1 year.
- 1.4 Initially the maximum level of premium was set by government at 50% of the amount of Council Tax chargeable. Each Council could determine the level of premium up to the maximum and this is charged in addition to the amount determined by the Council as payable for an empty dwelling<sup>1</sup>
- 1.5 Certain classes of dwellings cannot be charged a premium namely:
  - a dwelling which would be the sole or main residence of a person but which is empty while that person resides in accommodation provided by the Ministry of Defence by reason of their employment i.e., service personnel posted away from home<sup>2</sup>; or
  - dwellings which form annexes in a property which are being used as part of the main residence or dwelling in that property<sup>3</sup>.
- 1.6 In 2018 the Rating of Property in Common Occupation and Council Tax (Empty Dwellings) Act allowed authorities to increase the level of premiums on empty dwellings with effect from 1 April 2019 as follows;
  - Dwellings left unoccupied and substantially unfurnished for 2 years or more, - from 1 April 2019 a premium can be levied up to 100%;
  - Dwellings left unoccupied and substantially unfurnished for 5 years or more, - from 1 April 2020 a premium can be levied up to 200%; and
  - Dwellings left unoccupied and substantially unfurnished for 10 years or more, - from 1 April 2021 a premium can be levied up to 300%.
- 1.7 It should be noted that premiums are charged in addition to the 100% Council Tax payable on empty premises.

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<sup>1</sup> Under the Council Tax (Prescribed Classes of Dwelling)(England) Regulations 2003 and amended by the Council Tax (Prescribed Classes of Dwelling)(England) (Amendment) Regulations 2012 - Classes C & D.

<sup>2</sup> Council Tax (Prescribed Classes of Dwelling)(England) (Amendment) Regulations 2012 - Classes E

<sup>3</sup> Council Tax (Prescribed Classes of Dwelling)(England) (Amendment) Regulations 2012 - Classes F

- 1.8 Government, together with local authorities (including the Council) has unfortunately seen a rise in the number of empty homes together with a growth in second homes.
- 1.9 Inconsistencies in the legislation have also been identified whereby a premium can be avoided by the taxpayer merely furnishing an empty premises, when it would become a 'second home' which currently has a maximum charge of 100% with no premium.
- 1.10 In order to address these inconsistencies, and also to bring more dwellings into use, government has introduced sections within the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023 (the Act).
- 1.11 This policy details the Council's approach in the charging of premiums as allowed within the new legislation.
- 1.12 The continued pressure on local authority finances (both the Council and the Major Preceptors) together with the need to encourage all owners of domestic premises to bring them back into use, makes it essential that the Council changes its approach to empty homes. The new legislation for second home premiums will encourage the use of dwellings as primary residences.

## **2. Empty homes premiums (From 1 April 2024)**

- 2.1 Section 79 (1) (b) of the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023 permits the Council to impose an empty homes premium after one year instead of two years. Section 80 of the Act provides that from 1 April 2024, a property can be charged an empty homes premium at 100% after one year, even if it became empty before 1 April 2024.
- 2.2 The Council has resolved to implement the change with effect from 1 April 2024.
- 2.3 The legislation requires the Council to be mindful of any guidance or further regulation in relation to the implementation of the premiums and this is detailed in Section 4 of this policy.

## **3. Introduction of premiums for second homes (From 1 April 2025)**

- 3.1 The definition of a second home for Council Tax purposes is a dwelling which has "no one resident" but is "substantially furnished".
- 3.2 Section 80 (2) of the Act inserts a new section 11C into the Local Government Finance Act 1992. This permits the Council to apply a premium on second homes. The maximum Council Tax charge in these cases would be a standard 100% charge plus a premium of 100% making a total Council Tax charge of 200%.

- 3.3 Unlike empty dwellings, there is no requirement for a property to have been used as a second home for a fixed period of time before the premium can apply.
- 3.4 As with other changes introduced by the Act, section 11C (3) requires that the first decision to impose this class of premium must be taken at least 12 months before the financial year to which it would apply. In effect this means that premiums for second homes will not take effect until the 2025-26 financial year at the earliest.
- 3.5 The Council has resolved to charge second home premiums and has given the required notice.
- 3.6 The Act provides that a dwelling cannot be subject to both a second homes premium and an empty homes premium imposed under section 11B of the 1992 Act, and that an existing empty homes premium would cease to apply to a property which became subject to a second homes premium.

#### 4. Exceptions from the premiums (empty homes premiums and second homes premium)

- 4.1 Government has stated that regulations providing exceptions to the premiums will be laid in 2025. In the meantime, the Council has decided to allow the following exceptions:
- **Properties undergoing probate:** the Council will allow a 12-month exception from the empty and second home premiums after probate or letters of administration have been granted. The dwelling will be liable for the 100% of council tax once the class F exemption has ended; but a premium will not be levied for a 12-month period;
  - **Properties that are being actively marketed for sale or rent** - the Council will apply an exception for up to a **maximum of 12 months** from the date that active marketing commenced, or until the property has been sold or rented, whichever is the sooner. The Council, in determining whether this exemption applies will require the following evidence:
    - (a) evidence that the dwelling is being **actively** marketed for sale or rent through a recognised agent (evidence can include contracts with agents, advertisements in recognised newspapers or marketing websites);
    - (b) where the premises are being self-marketed by the owner or landlord, evidence that the premises is being **actively** marketed (evidence can include advertisements in recognised newspapers or letting websites);
    - (c) where for sale, evidence that the premises are being sold at a true market level for the size and type of dwelling within the area in which it is situated. Where the dwelling is for let, that the rent requested is at a true market level for the size and type of dwelling within the area in which it is situated.

The above list is not exhaustive and the Council reserves the right to request further evidence to support any claim for exceptions. The exception will only apply **once** to that dwelling for any taxpayer or taxpayers if they are jointly and severally liable;

- **Empty properties undergoing major repairs** - this exception is time limited to 12 months. The Council has decided that empty dwellings undergoing major repair works or structural alterations should be an exception to the premium for up to 12 months once the exception has been applied or when the work has been completed, whichever is the sooner. The exception will be applied at any time after the dwelling has been empty for at least 12 months, so long as the Council is satisfied that the necessary repair work is being undertaken. As with all other exceptions to the premiums, the Council will require the taxpayer to provide such evidence as is required to support their application;
- **Annexes forming part of, or being treated as, part of the main dwelling** - the Council will except such annexes from the Council Tax premium on second homes;
- **Job related dwellings** - currently, there is a Council Tax discount of up to 50% for properties which are unoccupied because the owner is required to live elsewhere for employment purposes. The discount applies where the dwelling is provided for the better performance of the duties of the employment, and it is one of the kinds of employment in the case of which it is customary for employers to provide dwellings for employees. The Council has decided that the dwelling should also be excepted to the second homes premium. **The exception will not apply to cases where someone chooses to have an additional property to be closer to work while having a family home elsewhere or where an individual is posted to a new location but maintain their previous address;**
- **Occupied caravan pitches and houseboat moorings** - the Council has decided that these caravans and boats should be an exception to the Council Tax premium on second homes; and
- **Seasonal homes where year-round or permanent occupation is prohibited or has been specified for use as holiday accommodation or prevents occupancy as a person's sole or main residence** - the Council has decided that dwellings that have restrictions or conditions preventing occupancy for a continuous period of at least 28 days in any 12-month period, or specifies its use as a holiday let, or prevents occupancy as a person's sole or main residence, should be an exception to the second homes premium.

## 5. Outcome expected and 'safety net'.

5.1 The expected outcomes of this policy are as follows:

- (a) Taxpayers will be encouraged, through the implementation of the premiums, to bring empty properties into use and to revert the use of second homes to primary residences;
- (b) The reduction of empty homes and second homes within the Council's area in line with the Council's Empty Property Strategy; and
- (c) Increased Council Tax income from empty homes and second homes.



- 5.2 There may be circumstances where the implementation of these changes may cause exceptional hardship to a taxpayer. In such cases, the Council will consider applications for a reduction in liability under its Section 13A (1)(C) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 - Reduction in Council Tax liability policy.
- 5.3 Where such an application is received, it will be considered on an individual case basis taking into account the circumstances of the taxpayer and the situation regarding the level of Council Tax charged. Should the taxpayer be aggrieved by any decision of the Council a further right of appeal will be with the independent Valuation Tribunal.

## **6. Legislation**

- 6.1 The legislation that covers this policy and the recommendations made is as follows:
- S11A & S11B of the Local Government Finance Act 1992;
  - S11C of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 (as introduced by the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023);
  - The Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023; and
  - S13A(1)(C) Local Government Finance Act 1992 (reduction in liability).
- 6.2 Due to changes in the legislation, the Council will be required to amend this policy, at any time, in line with statute.

## **7. Finance**

- 7.1 Any amount of premium received will be part of the Council's Collection Fund and will be shared between the Council and Major Precepting authorities in line with their share of the Council Tax.
- 7.2 Any reduction granted under S13A(1)(c) will be financed through the Council's general fund and do not form part of the Collection Fund.

## **8. Notification**

- 8.1 Where a taxpayer is granted an exemption, a revised demand notice will be issued. Where an exemption is applied for but not granted, the Council will provide a notification of its decision.

## **9. Appeals**

- 9.1 Appeals against the Council's decision may be made in accordance with Section 16 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992.

**9.2 The taxpayer must in the first instance write to the Council outlining the reason for their appeal. Once received the council will then consider whether any additional information has been received which would justify a change to the original decision and notify the tax payer accordingly.**

9.3 Where the taxpayer remains aggrieved, a further appeal can then be made to the Valuation Tribunal. This further appeal should be made within 2 months of the decision of the Council not to grant any reductions. Full details can be obtained from the Council's website or from the Valuation Tribunal Service website.

## **10. Delegated Powers**

10.1 This policy for the Council Tax premiums has been approved by the Council. However, the Lead Specialist, Service Delivery is authorised to make technical amendments to ensure it meets the criteria set by government and the Council.

## **11 Fraud**

11.1 The Council is committed to protecting public funds and ensuring that premiums are correctly charged.

11.2 A taxpayer who tries to reduce their Council Tax liability by incorrectly or falsely declaring their circumstances, providing a false statement or evidence in support of their application, may have committed an offence under The Fraud Act 2006.

11.3 Where the Council suspects that such a fraud may have been committed, this matter will be investigated as appropriate and may lead to criminal proceedings being instigated.

## **12. Complaints**

12.1 The Council's complaints procedure (available on the Council's website) will be applied in the event of any complaint received about this policy.



# Technology Strategy 2024 – 27

**Document Version:** 1.0

**Written By:** Lead ICT Specialist Grant C Hulley

**Reviewed By:** Assistant Director of Resources Annette Cardy



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### Key Information - Governance

The Strategy applies to:	Maldon Council officers
Committee the last ICT Strategy was approved at:	Council
Date of when the Strategy was approved:	30 June 2021
Last improvement Strategy for reference:	<a href="#">ICT Strategy</a>
This Strategy is due its next review:	31/03/2028



## Technology Strategy 2024 - 2027

### Executive Summary

This technology strategy sets out Maldon District Council's technology vision of the future and how technology can support the delivery of its corporate priorities set within the Corporate Plan 2023 – 2027 for the years 2024 to 2027.

As the technology strategy priorities are based on the Corporate Plan the following priorities are key to this strategy:

- **Supporting our communities**
  - Services delivered intelligently.
- **Enhancing and connecting our place**
  - More connected services
- **Helping the economy to thrive**
  - Reduced resource and services costs
- **Smarter finances**
  - Reduction in Technology costs.
- **A greener future**
  - Reduction in our technology CO2 and electrical usage.
- **Provide good quality services.**
  - Continued improvements to core systems and services.

Local government is facing challenging economic pressures alongside an increase in customer expectations. The way we use our technology is more vital than ever to support the enhancement of services to the residents of Maldon.

The Department for levelling up, housing and communities require local government to identify productivity plans to include 'How we plan to take advantage of technology and better use of data to improve decision making, service design and use of resources. The Technology strategy is a key contributor to this.

This strategy identifies four key priorities which provide the foundation for the council's technology framework and support the delivery of the authority Corporate Plan. These four priorities are listed below.

1. Managing Risk, Security and Compliance
2. Infrastructure for Digital Transformation
3. Streamlined Digital Processes
4. Data Insight



The aim of these is to foremost ensure stability and then provide for controlled development through the continued delivery of high quality, secure, agile, and cost-effective systems which enable flexible and efficient ways of working.

Focus will be on the **reduction of its technology footprint** to support **the green initiative** and **smarter finance's** whilst **streamlining services** and harnessing data to **support the communities, connecting our place, and improving the quality of service.**

## Introduction

The significant challenges that face the Council have prompted an organisational change in agenda which determines how services will be delivered and accessed by residents in the future. Key challenges include, hybrid working, budgetary constraints, increased customer demand and efficient resource requirements; and plans need to consider how Maldon District Council can make more efficient use of resources, work in closer collaboration with different agencies to optimize outcomes, whilst managing increasing pressures for flexibility.

Digital solutions provide an opportunity to develop new products and services, to create, collaborate and build successful service delivery models at a scale and a speed that was previously unimaginable. Digital technology gives opportunities to reduce the costs and increase the quality of public services, change the way in which we learn, work, live and access information from the world around us.

As technology advances and new consumer service models evolve, our customers' expectations for accessibility change. There is a drive both internally and externally to ensure that our services are increasingly more accessible, anytime, anywhere, anyplace.

This technology strategy aims to provides direction and outline of strategic ICT priorities that will shape Maldon District Councils future environment. It provides a platform that can harness innovation for the delivery of new service models, whilst providing a stable and resilient infrastructure which facilitates the most efficient use of resources.

Implementing this strategy will enable Maldon District Council to build on its investments in hybrid working to date and drive its digital delivery models. We have limited resource in the ICT team and the defined priorities in this Strategy will define the development of the ICT roadmap and resource allocation maximising the resources available to gain the most benefit through automation and the migration to cloud based infrastructure.

This strategy will be a 'living' document updated to respond to the changing and evolving business needs as and when change occurs. ICT's focus will be the removal of legacy systems in favour of a smarter more streamlined system enabling the council to better streamline its services to the public, as shown in the technology roadmap.





## Future long term technology vision

To align to the Corporate Plan the future technology vision must extend on the council's vision:

‘To be a sustainable council, promoting growth and investment at every opportunity. To support our communities through excellent partnership working and to maintain and improve quality of life’ The council will develop a technology architecture, built upon a fully integrated, data driven Authority that facilitates end to end digital service delivery across all the corporate business areas.

This framework will have Business Intelligence at its heart, providing corporate leadership, service managers and Council Members with the data and insight they need to make operational and strategic decisions, allowing the council to commission services based on detailed knowledge of the needs of our customers.

Much of this strategy will be delivered using cloud-based products, integrated into line of business applications.

The following slides set out the strategic priorities, which then shape our aims of the technology strategy i.e how we get there.

## Sustainability statement

MDC is committed to the use of sustainable technology within the end-to-end transformation of the council systems and services.

During engagement with external suppliers Maldon District Council actively drives the use of low carbon solutions alongside more energy efficient systems, A 2018 study found that using cloud systems such as Microsoft can be up to 93 percent more energy efficient and up to 98 percent more carbon efficient than current on-premises solutions. This strategy has a core focus on the migration to Cloud technologies for which one benefit is the reduction of energy use and the use of sustainable power sources.

## Strategic Priorities

### Strategic ICT Priority 1: Managing Risk, Security and Compliance

It is vital that the council is a secure place to work, learn and do business. Getting security right is a fundamental enabling element of our digital ambitions. As we carry out more transactions and share more information online the greater the risk of our information, operations and finances being stolen, exploited or disrupted. These risks will only increase as we build and benefit from the internet of things innovation. Our reputation for cyber resilience has the potential to quickly become a determinant of future economic success. We will ensure that;

- People can access straightforward, reliable and easily accessible advice on cyber security.
- We share information about cyber threats across sectors and are well prepared to manage them.
- Our digital public services are safe and secure to use.
- The systems and process we use are appropriately maintained/ robust
- There is resilience in key customer processes to ensure we deliver services effectively



- We will work with academic institutions partners to enable effective and coordinated cyber security research and innovation.
- Cyber resilience skills are embedded within our wider digital skills ambitions.

#### ***Outcomes, measures of Success***

- Ensure accreditation to national information security and governance standards. (Cyber Assessment Framework, Cyber Essentials Plus by 2026)
- Embed good security practice in all staff behaviour. (Training and testing through third party systems such as Boxphish with monitoring of outcomes)
- Deliver core customer processes in a consistent way
- Cyber Policies approved and in place (Inc AI, Cyber, Usage, Passwords)
- Active Directory migration to Azure Active Directory and cleansed
- Permission control based on group access and cleansed
- Removal of the Active Directory (AD)
- System training In-house to officers and members to support service delivery

#### **Strategic ICT Priority 2: A Modern ICT Infrastructure that enables digital transformation.**

Maldon District Council currently operates in an isolated environment whereby digital services do not all talk to each other across services. We will seek to build our internal Digital Business Technology Platform (Dynamics), developing centralised processes, and be a front runner for sharing and improving access to services across a network of authorities.

Our approach is to:

- Simplify and standardise ways of working across the council so that it becomes easier to use our services.
- Create common digital platforms for services that will encourage innovation in the delivery of public services whilst ensuring that the platforms and technologies are both secure and resilient.
- Make better use of cloud-based solutions as a source of both cost reduction and service innovation.

#### ***Outcomes, measures of Success***

- Commodity cloud services as well as shared service offerings will be meshed into an overall ICT platform for business use. A single platform will be presented built from a small number of providers (internal and external) E.g: Dynamics – Build based on process priority with visibility to CLT and ELT – 15 processes in dynamics by 2027
- 90% of our ICT infrastructure will be cloud based within 3 years. (Removal of the on site Data Centre and implementation of Azure services to allow for server migration into the cloud. 12 current hosts, 9 migrated to the cloud by 2026)



- Reduce the environmental impact of technology used by the council – Lower electrical and carbon use whilst achieving work force flow optimisations and savings through these optimisations.
- Building upon hybrid working to allow full remote access to systems and services from multiple device types and locations.

### Strategic ICT Priority 3: Streamline Processes to create an agile and flexible digital service model.

Automated Technology solutions facilitate new ways of analysing information in order to streamline processes and decision making. Using data from digital devices (sensors) that capture environmental and operational information from across the council estate, resources can be targeted more effectively, increasing capacity and reducing cost.

#### ***Outcomes, measures of Success***

- Adoption of Artificial Intelligence, Robotics and Machine Learning technology to drive process change.
- Create a culture of continuous process review and design to provide effective resource management.
- Develop a technology cost optimisation programme.
- Review Enterprise Resource Platforms and associated functions
- Create an Internet of Things network that provides data to improve infrastructure management and reduce climate change emissions.
- Task Smart / Dynamics delivery (PMO (P3), Stray Dogs, Environmental Health)
- Over all system reduction through the migration of data and services to new, intuitive systems

NB, although this is a goal of the strategy, acknowledging limited resources and the need to focus on systems architecture and security and resilience, investment in new technology is likely to have a smaller proportion of IT time/ resource allocated in the roadmap.

### Strategic ICT Priority 4: Developing Information for Business & Customer Insight

Data holds the key to unlocking innovation in public services. Better data sharing can generate new insights stimulate new ideas and deliver potential savings to the public sector. Such benefits will, however, only be realised if people in Maldon trust us to hold their data securely and use it in appropriate ways. We are already seeing benefits in areas of public service from the use of open and shared data. Collective data agreements are helping to widen access and reduce the costs of key data sources across the public sector.

#### ***Outcomes, measures of Success***

- Data from systems to be collated within cloud-based data stores enabling data mining to drive insights that support business decision making.



- Business users have tools to be able to navigate and draw knowledge from the accumulated data to support intelligence led commissioning.
- Data management processes are established as normal practice within business units supported by ICT services and tools to provide processes, governance and management of critical data.
- ARCGIS and Dynamics as a data centric system to optimise data sharing both internally and externally to drive work flow improvements.

## Information Systems and partners

We will manage data and security compliance at a level that provides assurance to customers and providers, that the information we hold is managed securely and governed within data protection regulations.

Microsoft will continue to be a strategic delivery partner over the life of this strategy and will support the council in delivering the **Technology Roadmap**. Projects over 2024 will be focussed on consolidation of key systems and using corporate technology platforms to deploy common standardised processes that facilitate automation and integration.

Using Azure cloud Business and Operational Analytics through PowerBI we will ensure that our core systems are fit for purpose and integrate with strategic delivery partner networks where appropriate.

The Microsoft Security and Compliance product suite will ensure our information and data is available to share within the constraints of a fully secure data governance framework. Automated document archiving, deletion and retention will optimise the way we store and retrieve data to ensure information is easily accessible.

Microsoft 365 power platform suite will facilitate collaborative systems and workplaces that increase resource capacity, capability and information sharing across multiple delivery agencies and providers.

In order to deliver the projects outlined in the Technology Roadmap we will continue to work in collaboration with the Essex Digital Partnership (EDP), Microsoft and Insight to ensure consistent operational technology support. Where specialist technical skills are required to implement specific transformational change programmes, we will engage with Microsoft 'gold' partners or their equivalent to provide innovative business solutions.

By using strategic delivery partners and a 'gold' partner supply chain we will deliver the following technology enabled strategic outcomes:



Provide staff, partners and public with access to reliable and predictable ICT services that fully exploit the benefits of technology.



Enable new ways of working and new service delivery models.



Use our information and data to drive an intelligence-based target resources where they can be most effective.



Provide secure, agile, and flexible digital technology solutions that empower customers and providers to improve service delivery.



Challenge and facilitate the business to take advantage of existing and new digital technologies.

## Resource and Governance

All organisational ICT decisions will be governed by CLT+ through the Lead ICT Specialist which will approve and advise Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) and Extended Leadership Team (ELT) on technology investment, direction and issues which have priority. Day to day ICT problems will be raised via Fresh Service (FS) and triaged to the appropriate knowledge base for assessment and diagnosis. High level FS tickets will then go to the Lead ICT specialist in prep for CLT+ based on the expert knowledge available. Doing so will give representation from all corporate directorates and area's, allowing for a global view of the council.

To ensure robust governance of technology commissions for both corporate and major business initiatives, The Lead ICT Specialist along side their stakeholders provide management oversight of technology programmes and projects holding the delivery partners to account, ICT workload for both projects and BAU will be based off the ICT Roadmap and a priority rating, new items following approval form CLT+ then get assigned a priority based on the roadmap and important to the council.

The Governance set out above will focus on:

- Priority setting and effective use of resources.
- Quality assurance
- Clearly defining roles and responsibilities
- Delivery outcomes and specific timetabling

The 'design authority' will reside with the Lead ICT Specialist who will define the overall corporate technology and strategic activity over the life of the Technology Strategy. Major initiatives to which ICT contribute will be set in accordance with the Strategic Delivery Plan. These priorities will be set out in an Infrastructure Business Delivery Plan and approved by the Corporate Leadership Team.

All corporate technology spend will be centrally managed by the Lead ICT Specialist via the ICT Budget with new technologies being funded from the forecast underspend.



When considering new technologies, an end to end process of analytic definition takes place to ensure new systems achieve the same or better levels of statutory and legal requirements, this is supported via direct contact with supporting legal bodies such as the National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC). Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC), Department of work and pensions (DWP) and the Local Government Association (LGA) to ensure Maldon District Council have the needed system for the next service delivery.

To ensure the council make best use of technology across the whole organisation we will develop additional skill sets within the ICT Teams including Change and Project Management, Business Process Analysts, Data Scientists, Programmers and Developers.

## Data and Business Intelligence

Digital data will enable the council to improve, optimise and reinvent existing business models, operating processes and outcomes. By using data strategically, the council will be insight driven, innovative and predictive when designing new service delivery models. Maldon Adopted a data management and insight strategy in 2023 which aligns to this data centric approach to our in house systems. ([Data Management and insight strategy link](#))

Digital is all about data. How it is collected, governed, secured and consumed. Data can be mined, refined and processed using automation to produce dynamic insights. This strategy must deliver a data infrastructure that promotes the innovative use of data across the public sector. It must encourage data sharing and collaborative insight to facilitate service improvement and awareness. It must have enterprise information management, governance, strategy, and skills embedded in the corporate culture.

We will utilise modern and collaborative tools to efficiently work together, deliver accessible services and reduce our carbon footprint. – MDC Corporate Plan 2023

At the core will be the Microsoft Azure Data Lake and Power BI analytics tool set. The data lake will have the ability to consume data from all line of business applications along with feeds from the Internet of Things (IoT) devices connected to cloud network services. This strategy sets the corporate direction and associated activities to achieve a corporate data platform that will be the central repository.

This will facilitate storage and analytic capability across multiple data sets from many services. Dynamic reporting will enable real time diagnostics and management information to be distributed across all levels of the council.



## Customer Engagement

Our customers will benefit from digital service delivery. The ubiquity of smart phones in all walks of life mean we must consider a transformation in customer engagement from a 'one stop shop' model to a 'no stop' model, in which all services we provide can be accessed 'on the move' from digital handheld devices.

To create successful digital services, we must focus on;

- Multichannel Delivery - User Centric, Personalised and Proactive
- Digital Platforms - Platforms, Partnerships and Ecosystems
- Data Centricity - Insight Driven, Innovative and Predictive

Our services must be integrated, personalised, and created using Human-Centred Design for better service outcomes. We must use data and provide knowledge to providers who can in turn develop Proactive Service Delivery Models that continuously receive digital feedback from service users.

We must continue to embrace and develop Automated Service Delivery techniques using newer technologies such as artificial intelligence, and machine learning to provide consistent, easily accessible transactional and informational services across a full range of public services.

Above all, we must empower our customers and providers to drive improvements in services using digital technology delivery models.





## The Technology Roadmap

A Technology Roadmap 2024-2027 supporting the delivery of our ICT priority and outcomes has been produced. The roadmap has four clear strategic priorities from this strategy with associated enabling projects. The projects are designed to encourage innovation and use of new technology, thereby shaping the way ICT is delivered across the Council.

In addition to this, Business As Usual (BAU) and core resilience will be factored into the ICT resource planning to allow for great optimization within the ICT teams.

In order to successfully develop and deploy activities within the roadmap, the Project management office (PMO) will be engaged to oversee each program and project of work.

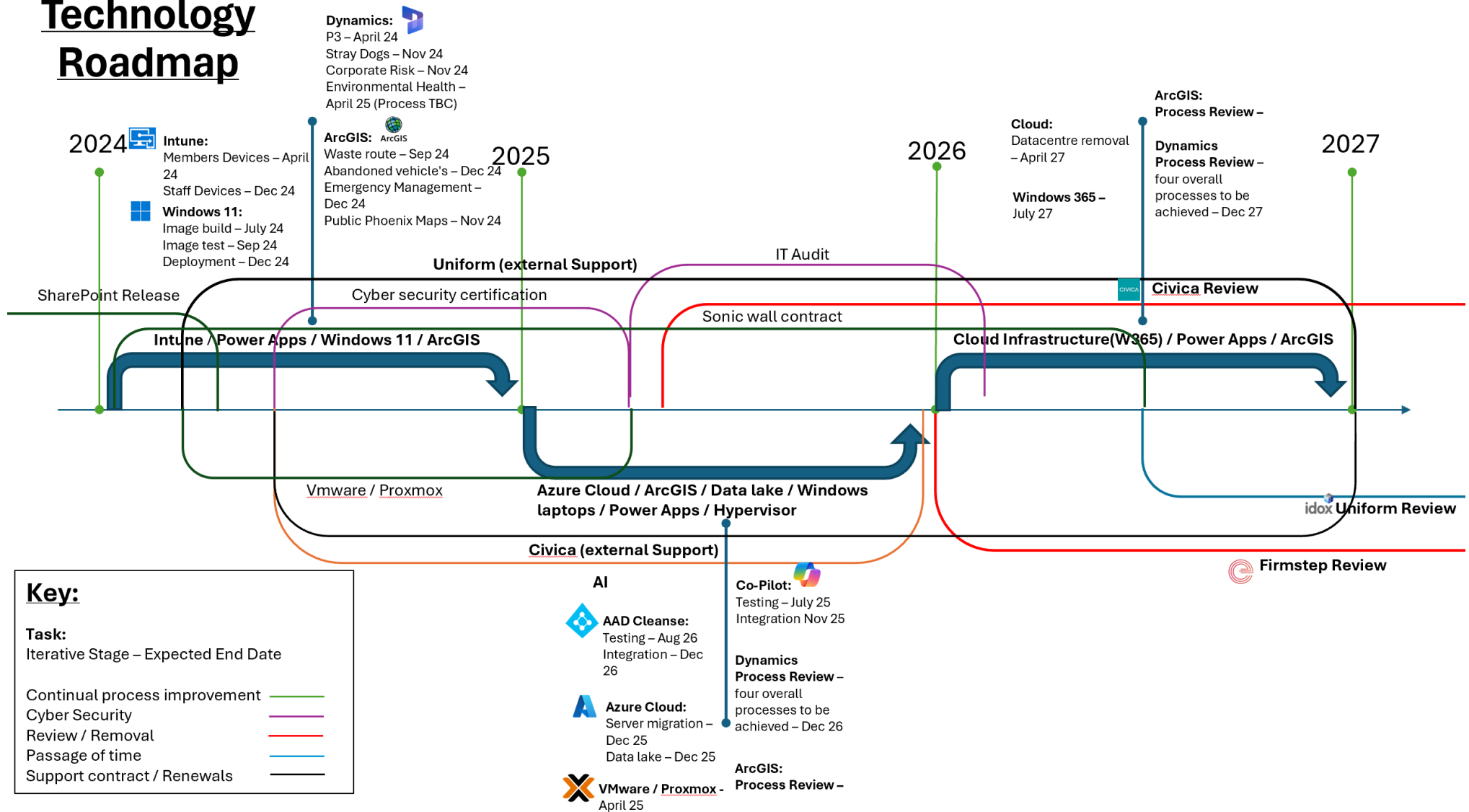
In order to make the most of technology investment the Council is committed to the continued optimisation and consolidation of all systems and applications using Enterprise Business Capability to digitise business process and reduce overall resourcing cost e.g Sonicwall

The Technology Roadmap is broken down into three key areas per year, over the period of the strategy including the task end date as shown below:

2024/2025	2025/2026	2026/2027
Dynamics		
P3 – Jan 24 - April 24	Stray Dogs – May 25 - July 25	Workplan will be defined Process and System review.
Planning – May 25 - April 25	Corporate Risk – Aug 25 – De 25	
	Environmental Health – Dec 25 – April 26	
ArcGIS		
Waste route – Sep 24 – Dec 24	Workplan will be defined Process and System review.	Workplan will be defined Process and System review.
Abandoned vehicle's – Dec 24 – Apr 26		
Emergency Management – Dec 24 – April 26		
Public Phoenix Maps – Nov 24		
Projects		
Intune – Feb 24 - April 25	Co-Pilot – April 25 - Nov 25	Windows 365 – April 26 - July 27
Windows 11 – April 24 - Dec 24	Azure – April 25 - Dec 25	



# Technology Roadmap





## Summary

Maldon District Council is on a digital journey. The roadmap to delivery started in 2019 with an ICT strategy that clearly set out a set of projects based on cloud computing, mobility and flexibility within a well-defined secure framework that enabled data sharing across multiple delivery providers and hybrid working for officers and members alike.

With this technology Strategy 2023-2027, the journey continues, building on the platforms developed thus far and developing them using technology solutions that have emerged in the last four years.

Technology advances and a migration in the cloud computing marketplace will enable Maldon District Council to take full advantage of cloud data storage capacity and analytics to develop digital feedback mechanisms that will enhance our authority and create customer service models designed to be hybrid, proactive and personalised.

Using AI alongside autonomous devices connected to and interacting with their environment Maldon District Council will be able to improve infrastructure management and reduce the environmental impact of service delivery. It will be able to develop service models that improve the lives of vulnerable people and allow them to live more independently.

This Technology Strategy supports Maldon District Councils Corporate Plan 2024 – 2027 and the key priorities that are working towards improving the lives of those who live, work and learn in Maldon.