

DIGITAL STRATEGY



INTRODUCTION

I am delighted to present Braintree District Council's Digital Strategy 2022-2026. Since the development of our last digital strategy, the world and the digital landscape have changed significantly.

In March 2020, when the initial covid restrictions were put into place, digital technology was crucial to ensure that Council services were able to keep running, particularly in relation to the way we communicate, work and support our customers.

This required us to completely reprioritise our digital approach. We very quickly enabled our workforce to be able to work remotely and we entered the world of virtual meetings, which until that time had not been required widely across the organisation.

As with the rest of the country, our district also relied heavily on technology to keep working and communicating, so supporting our residents and businesses to access and use digital technology became an even bigger priority.

Increased reliance on technology means that we need to continue to develop our resilience and ensure that we protect ourselves from cyber security threats internally. We also need to take a role in promoting cyber security across the district to help everyone to have the confidence to use technology safely.

This strategy sets out how we will meet these challenges and make the best use of technology to deliver better outcomes. In this strategy you will see that we are continuing with themes that reflect the different areas in which our strategy needs to focus:

- Digital Council
- Digital Customer
- Digital Place

There are a number of priorities in our previous strategy which are still relevant in the new digital landscape and these have been updated to be even more innovative and ambitious to reflect the current and predicted future need. We will be building on the work undertaken over the last five years, continuing to increase our efficiency and productivity by making better use of technology whilst ensuring that we continue to develop and promote our digital services to customers.

We will also continue to develop our role to support our communities and businesses to develop digital capability, with improved infrastructure, skills and access to help our businesses make the best use of technology to improve prosperity and our communities to feel more connected.

Cllr John McKee
Cabinet Member for
Finance & Corporate Transformation

OUR DIGITAL PURPOSE

The purpose of our Digital Strategy is to harness the use of digital technology and services to improve public services, improve access and connectivity, and improve our place for our communities and businesses.

Continuing to improve digital services is key to ensure that public services are easily accessible, cost effective and inclusive. This strategy aims to develop and improve our digital capability to reduce the cost of services, improve customer satisfaction with services and reduce inequality in access to those services. Digital services make it much easier for our customers to self serve, supporting us to manage demand on essential services.

Our digital strategy also underpins a number of our key corporate priorities and is aligned to our corporate strategy as well as key service strategies.

Improving digital connectivity and harnessing technology to meet future digital needs is a key priority for us. This is about the development of a high speed broadband and 5G network, but is also about how our physical infrastructure relies on the development of technology to enable growth, support community resilience across our urban and rural areas and improve opportunities for our residents and businesses.

This strategy sets out how we can also ensure that we develop the skills to make the best use of technology and use this to improve services, employability and innovation.

As communities increasingly take the lead in designing and developing solutions that work for them, our role changes from being a provider of services to supporting delivery across places and systems. This involves increasing collaboration across a range of partners and our technology needs to enable better collaborative working.

Our priority to create greener and environmentally sustainable communities is reliant on technology to reduce carbon impacting journeys, and ensure those we need to take are more environmentally efficient. Technology will also underpin the growth of our Green Economy, support innovative solutions to tackling resource and energy challenges and support our target to be Carbon neutral as a Council and a District.

Technology plays a key role in reducing health inequalities, supporting us to tackle social isolation and loneliness, using data to help protect the most vulnerable in our society and help us work with partners to support people to lead independent, healthy and active lifestyles.

OUR DIGITAL LANDSCAPE

The last two years have shown the power that digital technology has to transform the way that we live, shop, the way that we operate businesses and communicate with each other. This district benefitted from being able to use digital technology during an unprecedented time, and our residents and businesses have looked to use digital technology to adapt and keep things going.

The UK is making significant progress in rolling out wireless connectivity, with 92% of the UK landmass currently covered by a good 4G signal from at least one operator.

Braintree district has a Superfast and fibre coverage of 96.9%, and we are working with Superfast Essex, the broadband improvement programme run by Essex County Council, to

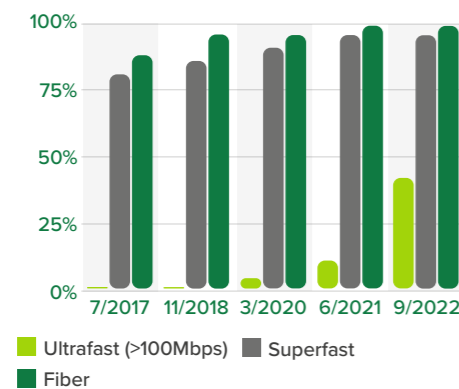
improve this figure to a forecasted 99% by the end of 2023.

Since the Covid pandemic our home requirements for internet have increased with 79% of people within Essex working from home and 49% of homes having two or more people working remotely.

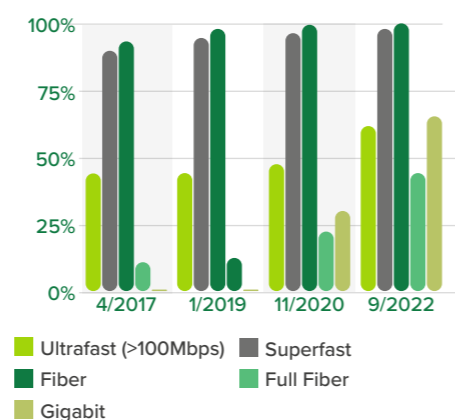
In the UK 96% of households have access to the internet (2020) which is up from 57% in 2006*. However, whilst the Covid-19 pandemic enabled some adults to gain new digital skills and enjoy the benefits of being online, for others the digital divide has become more entrenched as an increasing number of everyday activities and services have moved online. Often these will be older or more vulnerable people.

*ONS February 2020

BRAINTREE SUPERFAST AND FIBRE COVERAGE

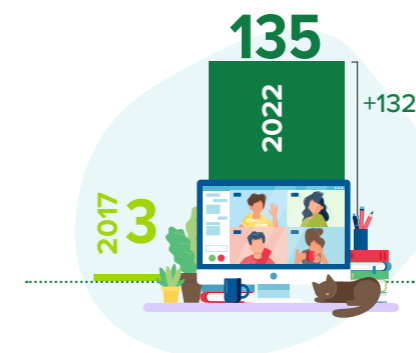


ESSEX SUPERFAST AND FIBRE COVERAGE

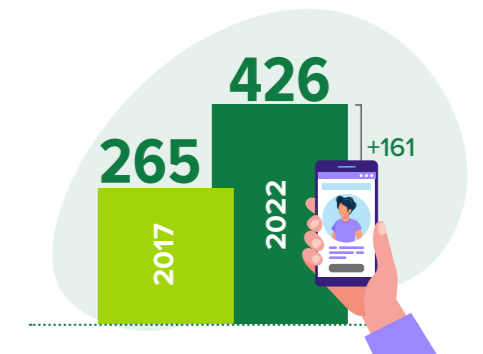


As a Council we have changed the way we work over the period of the last digital strategy. The stats below give an indication of how our use of technology has changed.

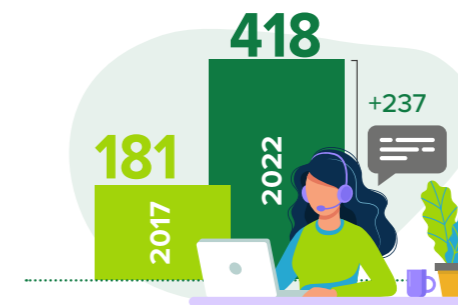
REMOTE CONNECTIONS (Flex/Agile Workers)



MOBILE/TABLETS IN USE



LAPTOPS IN USE



INTERNAL TEAMS CALLS



TEAMS MEETING PARTICIPATED IN

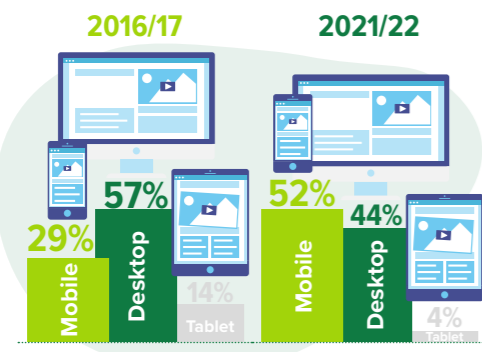


TEAMS CHAT MESSAGES SENT



Our customers have changed the way that they engage with us, which has meant we needed to update our technology to be responsive to demand.

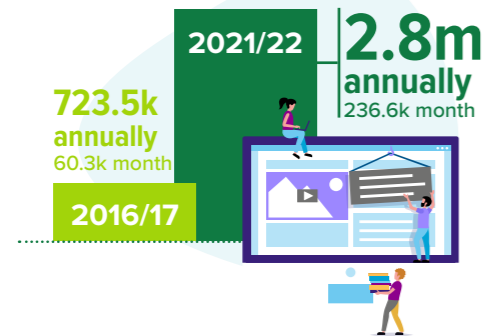
VISITOR DEVICES:



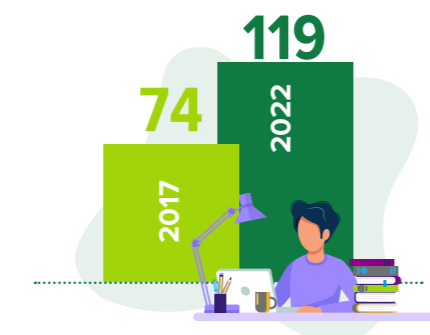
NUMBER OF ONLINE TRANSACTIONS



VISITS TO OUR WEBSITE



ONLINE SERVICES OFFERED

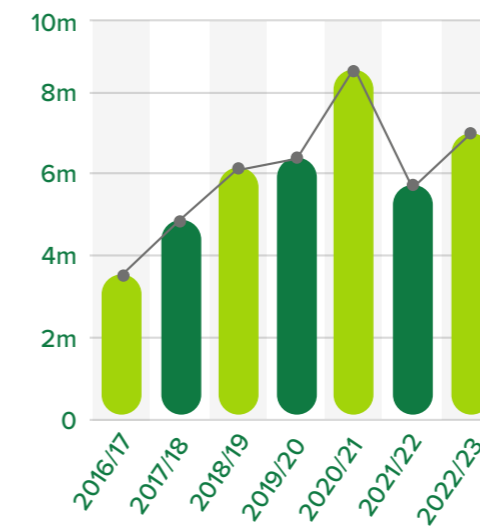


UNIQUE VISITS TO OUR WEBSITE

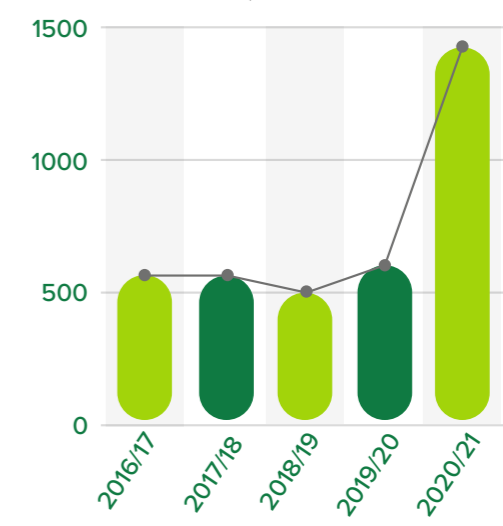


In April 2018, we had 28,000 social media followers across all of our platforms; in August 2022 this rose to 66,000.

SOCIAL MEDIA IMPRESSIONS:



SOCIAL MEDIA ENQUIRES:



ACHIEVEMENTS

This Strategy builds on our existing work to develop digital services for our Council, customers and place. There has been a range of projects and achievements delivered through the life of the previous strategy, and below is a selection of some of our achievements.

- In 2022 we have supported over 100 businesses to access digital skills and training, delivered training courses ranging from social media skills to web development and supported 120 residents with basic digital training, supply of equipment and connectivity.
- In 2020 we upgraded our website to WCAG (Web Content Accessibility Guidelines) 2.1 and AA standard for accessibility as well as reviewing and updating structure, content and usability to meet customer needs.
- Our online services have been reviewed and improved to enable more transactional capability including the introduction of online bookings, service and project microsites and improved geographic and spatial capability to improve customer experience.
- We have supported Community and Voluntary sector organisations to run a range of basic digital skills courses and in some cases to provide equipment to the digitally excluded. This has supported residents to access employment, increase confidence and to go online more safely.
- Internally we have introduced new systems and upgraded our existing corporate systems to improve functionality, security and usability, ensuring that they are fit for purpose. All staff have been upgraded to Office 365 with access to Teams and SharePoint which has improved our collaborative working.
- We have moved to internet based telephone communication, reducing the cost of calls and officers are currently implementing fully unified communications tools to further reduce costs and improve user experience.
- We have continuously reviewed our cyber security and have made a number of significant improvements, maintained our PSN (Public Sector Network) accreditation, and successfully achieved Cyber Essentials accreditation with Cyber Essentials+ planned by the end of 2022.
- We have integrated all of our property databases to create one master which has received national recognition as a Gold Standard LLPG (Local Land and Property Gazetteer).
- We have ensured that our staff can work flexibly through introduction of fully mobile hardware as well as being able to access key systems from wherever they are.
- Full rollout of video conferencing functionality has enabled appropriate hybrid and virtual meetings to be attended by staff, members and our customers.
- Supported other Local Authorities within the Essex Digital Partnership (EDP) with consultancy, ongoing maintenance and support arrangements. Talent and specialist skill sharing within the EDP has enabled us to both benefit from and provide timely resource as required.
- Supported local democracy, increasing accessibility for public meetings, as well as spatial mapping for Neighbourhood Plans and Election planning.
- Updated core Braintree District Council infrastructure to improve connectivity, security and resilience.



DIGITAL COUNCIL

OUR PRIORITIES

The way we work as a Council is constantly evolving to continue to meet the demands, challenges and expectations of our workforce and our customers.

Our aim is to embrace the opportunity for transformation and continuous improvement by:

- Supporting our Agile and Flexible working environment.
- Effectively using, managing and sharing our data.
- Creating and maintaining a resilient, secure and appropriate infrastructure.
- Providing Digital Skills, awareness and training.
- Embracing a Digital First culture which makes the best use of technology to improve productivity and efficiency.
- Ensuring the security, reliability, effectiveness and confidence in our digital platforms and technical infrastructure.

WHAT WE WILL DO

- Provide technology and solutions that enable our workforce to operate in an agile and flexible way to support the digital first approach to service delivery.

- Regularly review cyber security threats, ensuring that our organisation is well protected and that we have strong business continuity and disaster recovery plans in place.
- Keep abreast of the latest technological advances to ensure that we are well positioned as an organisation to take advantage of the opportunity that these present to enhance service delivery.
- Reduce the cost of service delivery through system alignment and integration that enhances productivity by removing duplication and simplifying processes.
- Improve our collaboration and knowledge sharing with partners to enable transformational change, a reduction in costs, and a coordinated approach to our workstreams.
- Ensure that the management and handling of data remains compliant with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), and to improve the way we use and share data to make informed decisions that create better outcomes for our customers.
- Improve our digital skills across the organisation to ensure that our staff and members are confident to embrace the use of existing and future technologies.



DIGITAL CUSTOMER

OUR PRIORITIES

We look to provide excellent services to our customers and value for money to the taxpayer. Our customers have different requirements and they expect to be able to interact with us in a way that is effective for them. We need to be responsive to changes in customer demands, ensuring that every customer has an equal opportunity to access the services we offer whilst ensuring that services are delivered in a cost-effective way.

We will seek to use technology to improve access to our services and ensure that they are usable for a wide range of customers with differing needs.

Our priority is to provide excellent services to our customers through:

- Offering a diverse range of easy to use digital services.
- Providing customer choice and alternative methods to digital service delivery.
- Effectively using our social media channels.
- Effective use and sharing of data.
- Being responsive to changes in demand and behaviour.

WHAT WE WILL DO

- Continue to offer contact methods that meet the needs of our customers, designing them with a digital first approach where possible.
- Promote and support the use of our digital services to enable interactions to take place at a time that suits our customers' individual and accessibility needs.
- Continually develop and improve our digital services by listening to our customers' feedback to ensure that they are easy to use and deliver the desired outcomes.
- Provide personalised and account based digital services that provide added value which will enhance the customer experience.
- Keep abreast of the latest technological advances to digital service delivery to ensure that we are well positioned as an organisation to adapt to changes in customer demand and behaviour.
- Further utilise social media platforms as an effective form of communication with our customers, businesses and communities.

DIGITAL PLACE

OUR PRIORITIES

As the use of digital technology and services becomes an ever-increasing part of our lives, we must continue to support the development of digital capability, to help our businesses make the best use of technology to improve prosperity and our communities to feel more connected.

It is vital to provide all residents and businesses the opportunity to use online services. We are working with Essex County Council and other partners to ensure that people have access to affordable equipment and connectivity and can complement this with the skills and confidence to take advantage of digital services and employment opportunities. The success of all of this is dependent on access to reliable and faster internet services.

Braintree District Council will continue to work in collaboration with local authority partners, Superfast Essex and broadband providers as well as with developers to ensure our communities are well connected. Excellent digital connectivity will also provide businesses with the foundation to build innovation and technology enabled business models.

We live in a data rich environment. News and information travels exponentially through digital channels which has many benefits. However, there are still those that are unable to take advantage of this and will need our support, guidance and confidence to fully embrace the digital world.

Our aim is to:

- Support the roll out and adoption of improved digital infrastructure.
- Improve digital skills, awareness and opportunities.
- Promote and support development of digital services.
- Enable and encourage digital innovation and collaboration.
- Reduce digital isolation and inequalities.

WHAT WE WILL DO

- Promote the inclusion of digital infrastructure as a priority as part of new developments and new communities within the district aligned to the ECC Digital Strategy.
- Support and encourage businesses to make innovative use of technology that could be useful and beneficial to both themselves commercially and to our place as a whole
- Promote the digital skills and learning opportunities to ensure all within the district can benefit from the use of the internet and what it can offer safely
- Continue to work with local businesses and communities to help with connectivity opportunities, technology development and use upskilling employees as well as working with schools and colleges to prepare people for the digital age.
- Explore the use of real-time information and data sharing with our partners to enhance the services and opportunities that are offered within.



DELIVERING THE STRATEGY

To deliver this strategy effectively we will need to work in partnership with residents, businesses, other Local Authorities, particularly Essex County Council, as well as community and voluntary sector organisations.

Resources in teams across the Council and partners will manage the delivery of the overall strategy and actions and projects will be developed and agreed through the Council's Annual and Business planning process and will be monitored monthly by management board and relevant portfolio holders. There will also be an annual report which sets out our progress against these targets which will be reported to Cabinet.

Progress against projects will be tracked, as well as key performance indicators designed to track outcomes against the strategy. These will include:

- Availability of technology services across the organisation
 - Data & connectivity
 - Key systems
 - Web services
- Response times to ICT incidents requests and internal customer satisfaction
- Cyber Security Incident reporting

- Website Statistics
 - Visits
 - Online transactions
 - Customer satisfaction
- Social media/digital engagements statistics
- Percentage of households in the district with access to Superfast/ Gigabit connectivity
- Percentage of district with 4G/5G access
- Digital skills/training statistics – residents and businesses

We will also benchmark our digital services against peers to ensure that we continue to provide high quality, value for money services to both internal and external customers.





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