

<b>Subject:</b>	Digital Strategy	<b>Status:</b>	For Publication
<b>Report to:</b>	Full Council	<b>Date:</b>	7 <sup>th</sup> July 2021
<b>Report of:</b>	Director of Communities	<b>Portfolio Holder:</b>	Communities
<b>Key Decision:</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Forward Plan <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<b>General Exception</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Special Urgency</b> <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Equality Impact Assessment</b>	Required:	Yes	Attached: No
<b>Biodiversity Impact Assessment</b>	Required:	No	Attached: No
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Adam Allen	<b>Telephone:</b>	01706 252428
<b>Email:</b>	adamallen@rossendalebc.gov.uk		

## 1. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1.1. That Full Council approve the proposed new Digital Strategy.
- 1.2. That Full Council approve the proposed roadmap to translate the Digital Strategy into a clear programme of projects over the lifetime of the strategy which will be consulted upon with Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

## 2. PURPOSE OF REPORT

To present the Digital Strategy to Council for approval and to explain the next steps in its implementation.

## 3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1. In the past 12 months, the council have achieved success in improving its ICT and digital systems. This includes the implementation of secure remote and home working, Microsoft Office 365 and introducing virtual meetings using both Teams and Zoom. All back office systems are available remotely to all staff that require them.

Enterprise licensing agreements have been renegotiated and established with key ICT vendors including Microsoft, Oracle, NPS, Cisco, Net App and Civica. This has resulted in improved commercial agreements and financial savings which have been reinvested in other improvements. An ongoing procurement plan is in place to maximise commercial opportunities and return on investment.

- 3.2. However, overall the council is behind the curve in terms of digital services. Many recent improvements have been internally focused and there is a need to set a longer-term vision for digital services that supports the ambitions in the new Corporate Plan and one which puts the Rossendale residents and businesses (our customers) at the heart of what we do. Putting the customer at the centre of our digital transformation is a key theme of the strategy and includes a commitment to tackle digital exclusion. In practice this will include continuing to provide face to face contact and telephone contact for those that favour this form of contact. However, digital services will be developed in order that, overtime they become the channel of choice for residents.

## 4. THE DIGITAL STRATEGY

- 4.1. Our vision is:

*“Rossendale Borough Council will put the customer at the heart of its services and utilise technology to improve the lives of residents and the efficiency and effectiveness of all Council Services.”*

- 4.2. How the council interacts with residents is a key determining factor in how the council is perceived. It is recognised that any future digital developments must be accessible to all and it is also recognised that direct customer contact with residents should be a focus. As a consequence the council is undertaking a Customer Service Excellence Programme to support this strategy. This programme will provide training to all staff on customer service excellence along with improvements to the customer journey.

To support the Customer Service Excellence programme, changes have already been made to the design of the One Stop Shop to allow for a greater choice of access by customers. The Rossendale One Stop Shop was one of only a few in the country that has remained open to appointments also catering for vulnerable customers during the COVID pandemic.

The One Stop Shop service delivery has also been improved to cater for customer requests such as adopting an appointment based service to prevent customers having to travel to Bacup in order to see a customer service agent. The new ways of working allows customers to be serviced in their own home providing greater flexibility and speed of service. This new approach has resulted in a reduction in repeat visits, as an initial phone call can ensure we get it right first time.

The One Stop Shop supports the methodology of the Customer & Digital Strategy by offering a face to face provision via appointment for customers who are unable to access services digitally.

- 4.3. Improving our digital delivery provides a number of benefits. It allows access to information and services 24/7 and in many cases allows much simpler and faster transactions. Digital interaction can be much more cost effective to the council. Face to face contact can cost up to £8.62 per interaction compared with a 15 pence cost for a website transaction. Refreshing the website and other customer facing channels will be one of the earlier projects to be delivered in order to release savings for reinvestment in front line services. The strategy includes a digital citizen programme which will involve work with community groups in order to improve the IT skills of residents.

- 4.4. The Digital Strategy will be delivered across four themes:

- **Digital Customer**

- To provide the best possible experience of interacting with the council and ensuring we get things right first time.
- To provide the preferred method of contact for the customer whilst encouraging residents to go digital and supporting digitally excluded residents to become digitally included.
- We will embed customer engagement and feedback into all areas of the council's digital work, we will consult and engage for all major change work across the council.
- To use data and customer engagement to understand our customers better and to continually improve the services that we provide.

- **Digital Workforce**

- To embed a culture within the council where technology is embraced by all staff to improve our services to the customer.

- **Digital Infrastructure and Digital Security**

- To ensure that all data and systems operated by the council are efficient, effective, secure and safe.

- 4.5. Following feedback from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, it has been agreed that we will adopt a digitally inclusive design process for the website by using Members, Officers, customers and external experts such as Ability Net to test the usability of the website during the design process.
- 4.6. The Digital Strategy is attached as Appendix 1 and it describes the high level actions required to deliver on the key overarching objectives across the four themes. Included within the strategy is a digital roadmap, which illustrates the projects that will deliver the strategy and the chronology of their implementation.
- 4.7. Funding for improvements in the current financial year (2021/22) will be met through existing budgets. The first full year of delivery will take place in 2022/23 and funding for this will be established through the Councils established MTFS budget setting process. As the delivery plans are developed, they will be consulted upon with the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Larger capital projects will be subject to a full business case and approved through cabinet.
- 4.8. Consultation has taken place with all political parties and Overview and Scrutiny Committee as part of the development of the strategy. As a consequence, the strategy has been amended to better emphasise areas such as data security and data use, improved community connectivity, accessibility; and customer and elected member engagement in developing services. It has also been requested that as detailed costings are established, that these are shared with Overview and Scrutiny for their input.

## 5. RISK

Investment in digital technology is one of the highest areas of spend for the council and it is essential that we have a clear rationale for future investment. This strategy provides that rationale. A full risk register will be developed as the projects are finalised and further authorisation for the major projects will be required as part of the overall capital programme.

## 6. FINANCE

- 6.1. Following agreement of the strategy and the roadmap, a fully costed programme will be developed. At a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel on 7<sup>th</sup> June 2021 it was requested that further details on individual project costs and timescales be brought back to be reviewed. The overall capital programme to implement the strategy will inform the development of the council's on-going Medium Term Financial Strategy.
- 6.2. The individual projects will be assessed on a case by case basis, with a fully costed business case being prepared for each project.

## 7. LEGAL

- 7.1. There are no specific legal implications arising out of the report at this time but further consideration will need to be given as the individual projects are commenced to ensure compliance with the council's Constitution, legislation and regulations.
- 7.2. Future ICT improvements will be compliant with all relevant data protection legislation.

## 8. POLICY AND EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed for the programme as a whole, however this this will require updating as projects develop. This strategy helps to facilitate the current flexible working policy and agile working.

## 9. CONCLUSIONS

A Digital Strategy is an integral part of transforming the way in which the council delivers its services and how the council is perceived by residents. This strategy provides an ambitious vision and a deliverable work programme which will help transform our approach to delivering services to the residents of Rossendale.

<b>Background Papers</b>	
<b>Document</b>	<b>Place of Inspection</b>
Digital Strategy	Attached as Appendix 1

# A “CUSTOMER FIRST” DIGITAL STRATEGY FOR ROSSENDALE

2021-2025



Rossendale  
BOROUGH COUNCIL

# OUR VISION

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“Rossendale Borough Council will put the customer at the heart of its services and utilise technology to improve the lives of residents and the efficiency and effectiveness of all Council Services.”



# INTRODUCTION

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How we engage with our customers is fundamental to how the Council is perceived and to how effective our services are. We want services to be designed around what the customer wants and also to deliver those services in the most effective way. The council has a commitment to a **“customer first”** approach.

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Delivering a “Customer First” approach increasingly relies on a strong digital offer which provides 24/7 access to services and up to date, accurate information.

**Our Place, Our Plan, the Council’s Corporate Plan sets out an ambitious four year strategy for our valley based on four strategic priorities, these are for Rossendale to have a:**



- Thriving local economy
- High quality environment
- Healthy and proud communities
- Effective and efficient council

**24/7 ACCESS  
TO SERVICES AND UP TO DATE,  
ACCURATE INFORMATION**

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# INTRODUCTION

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Digitally transforming our services and our approach to Customer Excellence underpins the delivery of our Corporate Plan and this strategy sets out our priorities and a roadmap establishing a “digital first” approach. The strategy sets out over-arching strategic objectives which will be delivered across four themes.

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## The over-arching objectives of our Digital Strategy are:

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|---|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• To provide the best possible experience of interacting with the Council and ensuring we get things right first time.</li></ul>  | <p>These objectives will be delivered through our <b>Digital Customer</b> theme</p>   | <p>80% as residents embrace our digital services.</p>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• To provide the preferred method of contact for the customer whilst encouraging residents to go digital and supporting digitally excluded residents to become digitally included.</li></ul>      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• To embed a culture within the council where technology is embraced by all staff to improve our services to the customer.</li></ul>  | <p>This strategy document establishes the Council’s approach to its digital transformation and outlines a high level action plan and the desired outcomes. The strategy also includes a digital roadmap that summarises the practical steps that are required in achieving our vision.</p> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• We will embed customer engagement and feedback into all areas of the Council’s digital work, we will consult and engage on all major changes to how we deliver our customer services.</li></ul> | <p>This objective will be delivered through our <b>Digital Workforce</b> theme</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• To ensure that all data and systems operated by the Council are efficient, effective, secure and safe.</li></ul> |  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• To Use data and customer engagement to understand our customers better and to continually improve the services that we provide.</li></ul>   | <p>This objective is delivered through our <b>Digital Infrastructure</b> and <b>Digital Security</b> themes</p>   |  |
|   | <p>This strategy builds on significant achievement such as all staff being equipped for agile working and a reduction in calls to the council of</p>  |  |



# PUTTING THE “CUSTOMER FIRST”

“Putting customers at the heart of everything we do, designing easily accessible services for all, that respond to our customer’s current and future needs.”

Our customer first approach will ensure that our digital transformation is rooted in what the customer wants.

This will involve a commitment to engaging and understanding our residents needs in future service transformation and ensuring that no resident is excluded from council services as technology advances.

A Customer First approach goes beyond access to technology and services, it requires the highest level of customer care across the organisation and should be reflected in all our customer interactions.

A customer service excellence programme is underway which will complement our ambitious plan for digital transformation.

This programme will embed our customer standards across the organisation, ensure staff are regularly trained in excellent customer service and ensure that service delivery is based on true and honest engagement with customers.



# CREATING A DIGITAL ROSSENDALE

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Our Customer First digital approach is not about replacing our services with digital only options, it is about encouraging and enabling those who can use digital and go on-line, to do so. To achieve this we will continually aim to provide simple and easy to use digital services that overtime become the go to choice for customers. We will also provide support to those that struggle to use digital services. Through a digital citizen programme, we will encourage and support customers to interact with the council digitally. Digital provides many benefits for the customer including:

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- Saving customers time and effort by making services available at a time most suitable to them with many services being available 24/7.
  - Digital interaction can be much more cost effective. Face to Face contact can cost up to £8.62 per interaction compared with 15 pence for a website transaction. These savings will be re-invested in improving services.
  - Creating new digital channels allows us to review how our services are delivered, becoming an important element in transforming services and ultimately in transforming the Council.
  - Redesigning our digital interface with the customer requires us to create a digital workforce which will result in internal processes becoming more efficient and it will allow us to better monitor customer standards. For example, our digital strategy is essential in delivering our flexible working policy.
  - A digital Rossendale will seek to include all customers of the Council on our digital journey. This will mean working with local businesses on the future digital infrastructure and working with partner organisations to connect us all together better.
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# DEVELOPING A DATA DRIVEN ORGANISATION

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Rossendale uses its data to both commission and deliver services. However, we must become better at understanding and utilising the data we have available to us.

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By managing our data better, we can make better informed decisions by identifying trends and patterns across the council. This can be used to improve and re-shape services to better meet the needs of our customers.

**To do this we will:**

- Get the basics right by ensure the data we collect is appropriate, accurate and stored in the correct systems, in the correct way and in accordance with the relevant data protection legislation. Appropriate retention periods will be applied and data will be held in a way that makes it easily reportable, without the need for manual intervention.
- Deliver accurate, relevant and accessible data that can be used to support decision making in

effectively predicting and planning, both tactically and strategically.

- View our data as a priority asset for Rossendale and make better use of it strategically to help the people and businesses across the borough.
- Develop a clear vision and approach to what we report and how we report it. This needs to be built upon the good practice and ensure confidence in the data we hold and publish.
- Simplify data collection, storage and use, minimising the number of different systems we use. We will maximise the use of core ICT systems and stop procuring and using bespoke, non-integrated, methods of data recording such as individual spreadsheets.

# DELIVERING THE STRATEGY

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Creating a Digital Rossendale is about more than just technology. Its success will depend on the successful engagement of our customers, staff and partners. It challenges us all to think differently and to rethink how we deliver services. Our Customer & Digital Action Plan is in 4 sections to ensure that we deliver digital services focused on the Customer, whilst building a digital workforce and providing the right infrastructure not just for the council but also to seek opportunities within the community and with businesses. The fourth section aims to ensure that our systems are safe and secure, protecting our customers information and Council systems.

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The action plan below is in four sections and each section describes the actions to be taken and the outcomes that are desired from completing each action, the sections are:



# 1. DIGITAL CUSTOMER

Our digital customer ambitions will be underpinned by our Customer First approach and in conjunction with our customer service improvement programme.

People expect services to be online and available on any device. Accessing simple council services online should be as easy as ordering from Amazon.

They should experience seamless services from us, with the opportunity to give feedback using the channels of their choice. This will reduce failure demand on our customer

service teams and business areas, and improve our resident, visitor and business experience of us.

The Council will provide services and information online to customers, members, partners and businesses through a number of key mediums, including the web, online accounts, forms, applications and social media.

Rossendale will adopt a digitally inclusive design process for the website by using Members, Officers and Customers to test the usability of the website during the design process.

Accessibility requirements aren't restrictions that need to be overcome - they're guidelines to improve online experiences for everyone.

Customers and businesses will be able to access our services 24 hours a day, from any location from any device. These online services will be designed to ensure that they are accessible, user-friendly and responsive to customer needs and make the best use of technologies available. The information and data will be more accessible through online Council channels, increasing accessibility and transparency.

## In practice, enabling the digital customer will include practical support such as:

- The provision of clear, concise and up to date information on all services provided by the Council
- The provision of online forms for all service requests or applications
- The provision of assistance and support for all customers requiring support with Digital channels

Our approach is not to reduce choice in how customers interact with the Council, but to make digital the first choice for customers. This approach will drive the customer contact from traditional channels such as face to

face, postal and telephony to online delivery.

We recognise that not all users of Council services may be able to use digital services independently. To accommodate these customers, the Council will adopt an approach of Assisted Digital and we will retain face to face appointments. This will ensure that everybody has access to the service or information they need regardless of individual circumstances.

A key customer of the Council is our local business community and we aim to work with local businesses to seize

the opportunities that technology provides in being innovative and competitive. This will require the Council to work with businesses in leveraging in external funding.

# OUTCOMES

By 2025 we will have delivered on the following key outcomes:

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- To have significantly improved customer satisfaction with the Council, to reduce complaints and to ensure that services are delivered in a way that the customer desires and that we always aim to get it right first time
- To have a significantly improved online customer journey that provides customers with real time information and access to most council services when they need it
- To have residents and businesses which are confident in using digital services

# STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

To achieve these outcomes we will focus on the following strategic aims:

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- To implement a corporate “Customer First” programme to improve customer service in all areas through an all staff training programme and the embedding of customer standards
  - Undertake genuine customer engagement and research to ensure that future services reflect customer/communities wants and needs
  - Consolidate and redesign all our websites to make them clearer and easier to navigate on all devices, including all digital forms
  - Implement a new telephony and contact system that will streamline all contact with the council and will allow corporate contact monitoring and improvement
  - To develop a “Digital Citizen” programme which supports our most vulnerable communities to engage and use the digital approach
  - To work with local businesses to seek external funding to improve their digital capability
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# OUTCOMES

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**By 2025 we will have delivered on the following key outcomes:**

- All staff being able to work effectively in the most convenient location and at the most convenient time to optimise productivity and reduce travel
- Staff who fully utilise the potential of council IT systems and who think of the customer first when developing front facing customer websites
- Much improved communication internally within the Council and externally with customers

# STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

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**To achieve these outcomes we will focus on the following strategic aims:**

- To provide the necessary devices and infrastructure to allow staff to access systems from any location to allow true agile working.
- Enable video conferencing across the council estate and to embed videoconferencing as our preferred method of meeting where this is more effective and productive.
- Implementing a unified communications system through telephony and the use of Microsoft Teams.
- To conduct an annual needs assessment with service managers to ensure that the most appropriate technological solutions are being implemented and that they are based on customer need.
- To launch a digital champions programme which upskills key staff across all services to support staff in their area and develop the digital offer



# 3. DIGITAL INFRASTRUCTURE

To provide a customer first approach and to develop a digital workforce it is critical that the council’s digital infrastructure is fit for purpose.

We recognise that broadband is still not affordable for everyone and across Rossendale our customers still face challenges with connectivity. This is why we will work with partners and lobby government to create a better-connected Rossendale, with accessible and faster broadband, Wifi,

mobile coverage including 5G and shared infrastructure.

Internally for the Council, this means systems that talk to each other on stable hosting platforms and utilising the best technology and modern architecture.

Our digital journey provides many associated improvements. Improved customer care and service efficiency and also an opportunity to minimise

the carbon emissions associated with our digital systems. This will contribute to the Council’s Carbon Reduction Strategy.

We will take a “Whole Council” approach when implementing our digital infrastructure which will include core ‘enterprise’ components such as; information, email, voice and data networks, hosting and client devices.

## The following key approaches will be adopted:

### Consolidation and Rationalisation

A reduction in the number of solutions and more joined up data, enabling services to share information resources and costs and co-ordinate actions more effectively. We will take a pragmatic approach to service provision, balancing the needs of agility, risk, value for money and user expectations.

### Value for Money

Leveraging ‘Enterprise Agreement’ licensing opportunities and the scale of the Council to drive competitive pricing and support from key vendors. We will look to reduce both capital and revenue investments.

### Service Agility

Users profiled into modern work styles, to ensure we provide them with the most appropriate devices and solutions needed - with secure access to corporate data and applications from a non-traditional office setting. Examples include; Office 365, Collaboration, Voice, Video conferencing and screen sharing capabilities, accessible from any location etc. Service Agility will facilitate the drive towards a ‘Paperless Office’.

### Service Integration

Use of standard integration patterns and specification, to provide system integration and information exchange with new service delivery bodies,

partners and suppliers. Where interfacing / integration is required between any elements of the architecture, the Council will require the solution provider to support a Service Orientated Architecture / Application Programming Interface design pattern approach, therefore minimising the Council’s Total Cost Ownership.

### Standards and Specifications

Adopted, implemented and governed use of best practice and industry proven standards and specifications. Examples include; Public Services Network, Government Digital Service - standards and specifications.

# OUTCOMES

By 2025 we will have delivered on the following key outcomes:

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- That all staff, Members and visitors have fast and reliable wireless access at all Council sites and to have exploited externally funded opportunities to improve connectivity within town centres and in poorly connected communities.
- A fully delivered digital roadmap that ensures that costs are minimised and all investment is in line with this strategy.
- To have a single safe and robust depository for all council data.
- To have continual independent reassurance that Council systems are safe and robust.

# STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

To achieve these outcomes we will focus on the following strategic aims:

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- Carry out a programme of connectivity improvements, increasing broadband width across all our sites and actively consider wider community and business Wi-Fi schemes in partnership.
- The development of a clear architectural vision for all council technology systems, minimising the need for specialist systems and maximising utilisation.
- To regularly audit our carbon footprint associated with our technology estate and embark on a greening programme in line with the Councils commitment to reducing carbon emissions.
- Continually review and refresh all existing and new technology policies and procurement.
- To achieve Tier 3, ISO 27001:2013 accreditation for all data centres.
- **Lobby Lancashire County Council, broadband providers and other key partners to ensure improved, affordable connectivity throughout the Rossendale area.**
- **Promote and support the government’s initiative to ensure access to gigabit-broadband by 2025.**

## 4. DIGITAL SECURITY

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There are significant risks involved when digital systems are expanded to hold more information and connectivity is improved to increase productivity. Data protection legislation is an ever-growing demand and the sophistication of cyber threats are continually increasing.

The significance of information and related technologies is increasing in most aspects of business and public life, with the associated information security and cyber threats also increasing.

We therefore have a greater need to mitigate information risk and protect our information and related ICT assets from ever changing threats. Security is an essential part of managing information and it is critical that we embed digital security alongside our improved customer experience.

We will operate with data security as a priority, ensuring that every interaction will maintain the integrity, confidentiality and security of customer information, complying with legislative and security requirements. This will ensure every interaction is safe, secure and appropriate.

The Council will maintain and build on the work already achieved in information security. The Council complies with security and quality standards including the Public Services Network, Payment Card Industry security standards and the International Standards Organisation information security management system (ISO 27001:2013). It is committed to upholding the principles of the Data Protection Act and the General Data Protection Regulation which protects data personal to individuals from being misused.

We will ensure that appropriate security is built in to the architecture and is designed to provide defence in depth. Technologies which protect the Council from the effects of cyber-attack and help to prevent data loss are deployed and these are coupled with policy and user education.

# OUTCOMES

By 2025 we will have delivered on the following key outcomes:

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- Ensured that the retention and use of all customer information is to the highest possible standards
- To have minimised the risk of human error and data breaches when using council data systems
- Minimised the risk of cyber-attack

# STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

To achieve these outcomes we will focus on the following strategic aims:

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**To achieve these outcomes we will focus on the following strategic aims:**

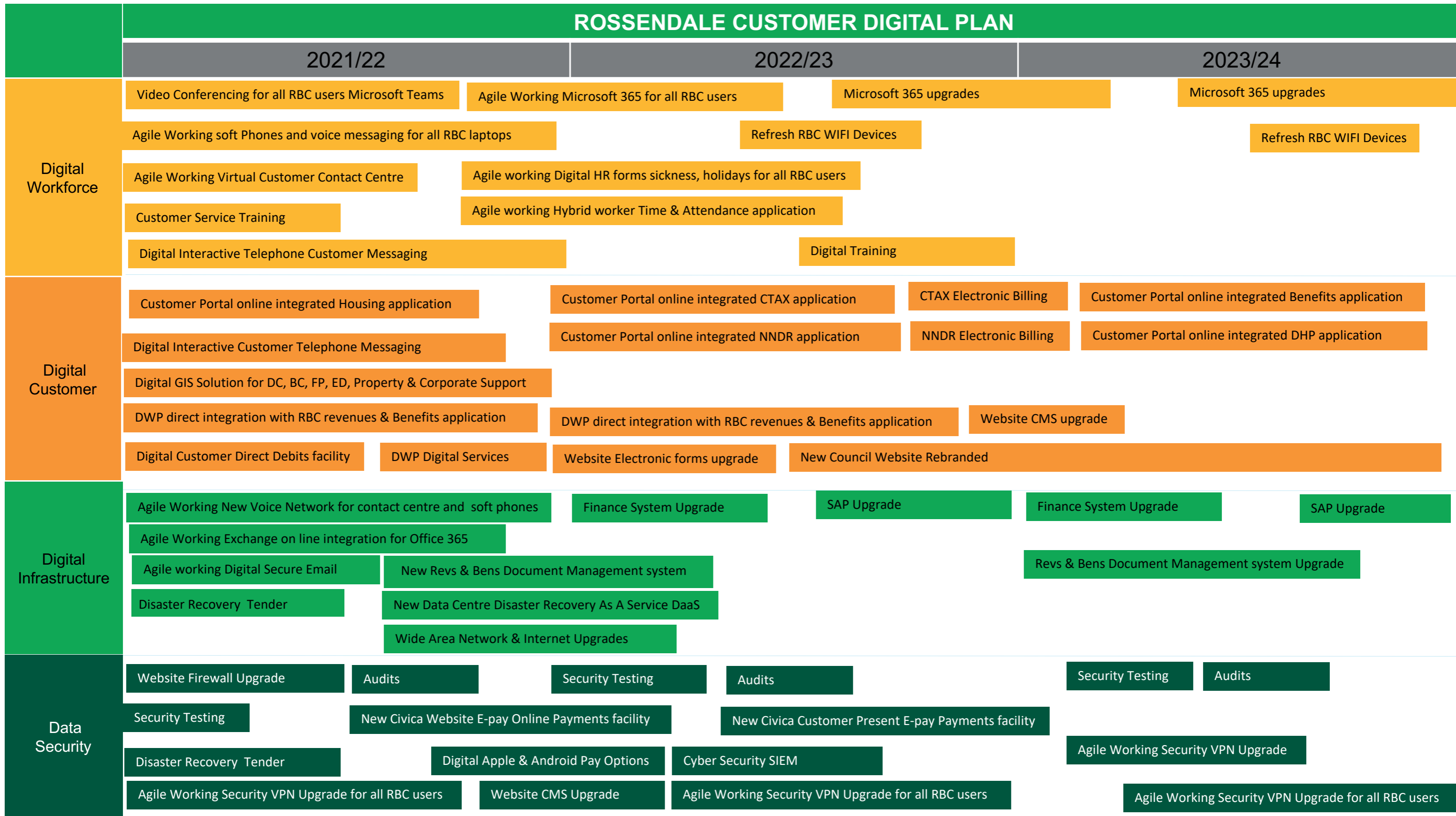
- Development of a highly secure email facility that protects residents, Council and partner information. This will ensure every interaction is safe, secure and appropriate.
- To implement regular training with all relevant staff to ensure they are aware of the risks associated with personal data and our specific systems.
- Deliver a security infrastructure roadmap.

# OUR DIGITAL ACTION PLAN AND ROADMAP

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Achieving our ambitions will require significant investment in new technological solutions over the next four years. The attached action plan illustrates in more detail how the strategic aims will be achieved and the attached digital roadmap illustrates the technological projects that will be necessary to successfully implement the strategy.

The implementation of each of these steps will be closely monitored through the councils’ governance processes.



Rossendale Borough Council  
The Business Centre, Futures Park  
Bacup OL13 0BB  
E: [generalenquiries@rossendalebc.gov.uk](mailto:generalenquiries@rossendalebc.gov.uk)  
T: 01706 217777

[www.rossendale.gov.uk](http://www.rossendale.gov.uk)

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**Rossendale**  
BOROUGH COUNCIL