



2025-
2028

Colchester City Council: Digital Strategy

Enhancing services through innovative technology and data, underpinned by robust governance, adherence to standards and guiding principles.



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FOREWORD

Councillor Chris Pearson

Portfolio Holder for Economic Growth, Transformation and Digital



Our Digital Strategy 2025–2028 sets out a clear commitment to modernising how we work. We're committed to improving the way residents and businesses access services, and ensuring our council remains resilient and responsive in the face of evolving digital technologies, changing community needs and the opportunities presented by Local Government Reorganisation (LGR). All in partnership with the Essex Digital Partnership and neighbouring authorities.

We understand the importance of harnessing accurate data, innovative digital tools and artificial intelligence (AI) to drive better decision-making, reduce risks and deliver positive outcomes for everyone in Colchester. Our approach is rooted in inclusivity, ensuring that every resident – regardless of background or ability – can benefit from accessible, secure and high-quality digital services.

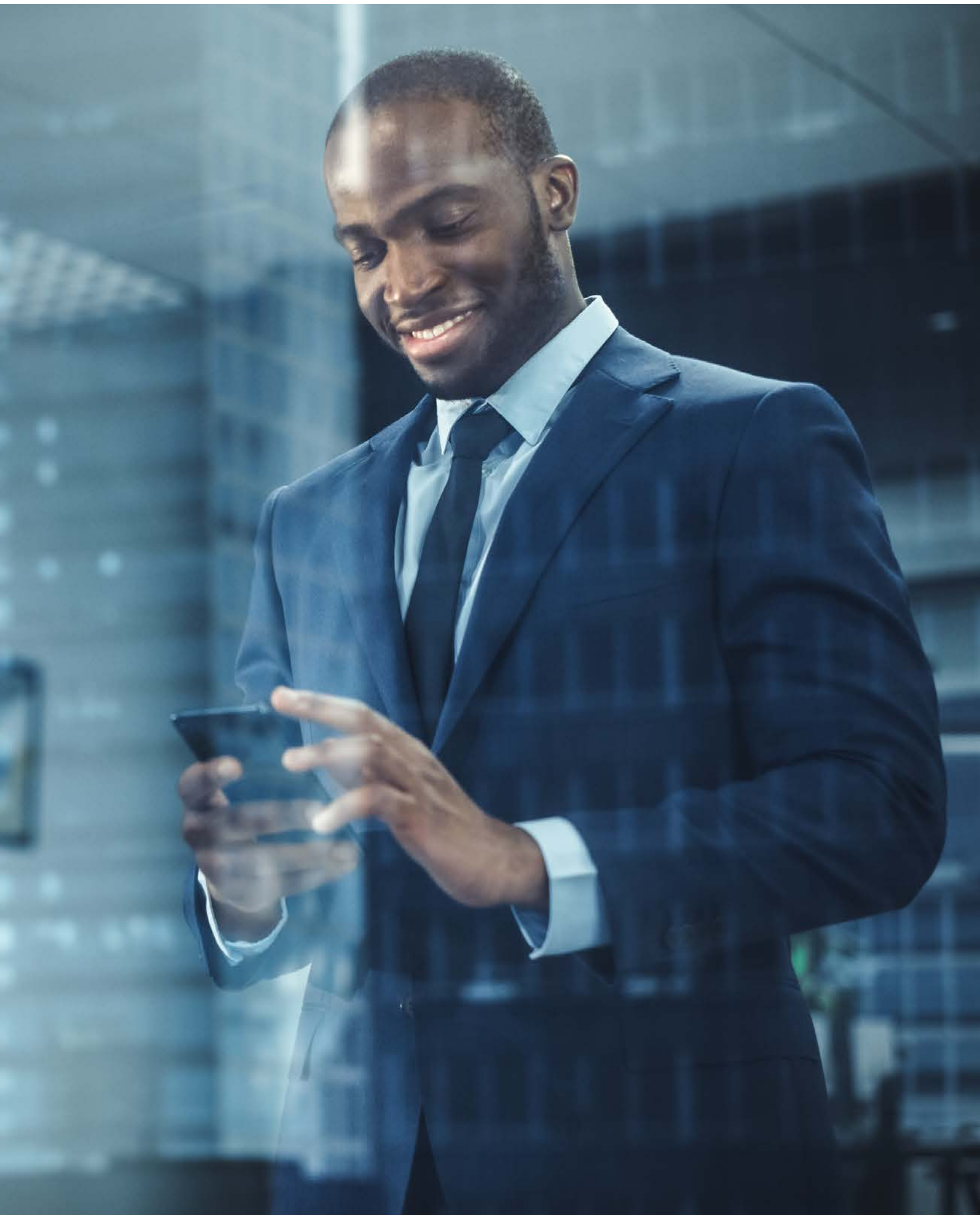
This strategy is shaped by the needs and aspirations of our

communities and staff. It focuses on upgrading our IT infrastructure, investing in automation and digital skills, and embedding robust cyber security and governance at every stage. We are committed to working within our budgets, maximising value, and fostering a culture of continuous improvement and collaboration.

As we prepare for LGR, we are working closely with the Essex Digital Partnership and neighbouring authorities to align our digital transformation with regional priorities. By establishing clear design principles and a joined-up digital pipeline, we will assess and deliver solutions that are fit for purpose, secure and provide excellent user experiences.

Our Digital Pipeline Board will oversee delivery, ensuring transparency, accountability and alignment with Colchester's ambitions for outstanding customer service, data protection and efficient, joined-up public services.

As we move forward, we will continue to listen, learn and adapt – embracing innovation and working together to build a council that is agile, inclusive and ready to meet the challenges and opportunities ahead.



PURPOSE

Colchester City Council is a modern, resilient, and responsive organisation, committed to delivering outstanding services for all communities. This strategy sets out a clear roadmap for modernising services, improving access for residents and businesses, and leveraging data and AI to achieve better outcomes.

Through technology and innovation, the Council ensures services are inclusive, secure, and efficient, supported by accurate data for informed decisions and continuous improvement.

Delivery of the strategy will be guided by clear themes that ensure customer focus, technology optimisation, data-driven decisions, and continuous improvement, underpinned by strong governance and alignment with regional priorities.

Innovation and learning will keep Colchester agile and well-prepared to meet future challenges, delivering outstanding services now and as part of future Local Government Reorganisation arrangements.



EMPOWERING COLCHESTER:

How our Digital Strategy supports our Vision and Improvement Journey

Accelerating Improvement & Modernisation

- Provides a clear, deliverable roadmap for digital transformation.
- Strengthens governance, transparency and innovation across all initiatives.
- Drives continuous improvement and modernisation of public services.

Unifying “One Council” Collaboration

- Integrates systems, data and teams for unified service delivery.
- Fosters collaboration and breaks down silos across departments.
- Aligns digital transformation with regional priorities and partnerships.

Maximising Efficiency, Security and Value

- Streamlines processes and embeds automation for greater impact.
- Embeds cyber security and resilience at every stage.
- Ensures services are safe, secure and deliver best value within existing budgets.

Empowering People and Partnerships

- Invests in digital skills, peer learning and leadership.
- Attracts and retains digital talent to strengthen teams.
- Champions digital inclusion and empowers communities through innovation.



STRATEGIC DIGITAL GOVERNANCE

The Digital Pipeline Board leads Colchester's digital transformation, providing strategic oversight to ensure all digital initiatives, data use and workforce enablement deliver real value for residents, communities and staff.

The board is committed to embedding cyber security and safe, secure service delivery at every stage, while ensuring digital solutions are fit for purpose, deliver excellent user experience, and maximise value within existing budgets. Representatives from Procurement, Information Governance, the Project Management Office, digital experts, operational leads, and workforce champions work together to drive a joined-up approach.

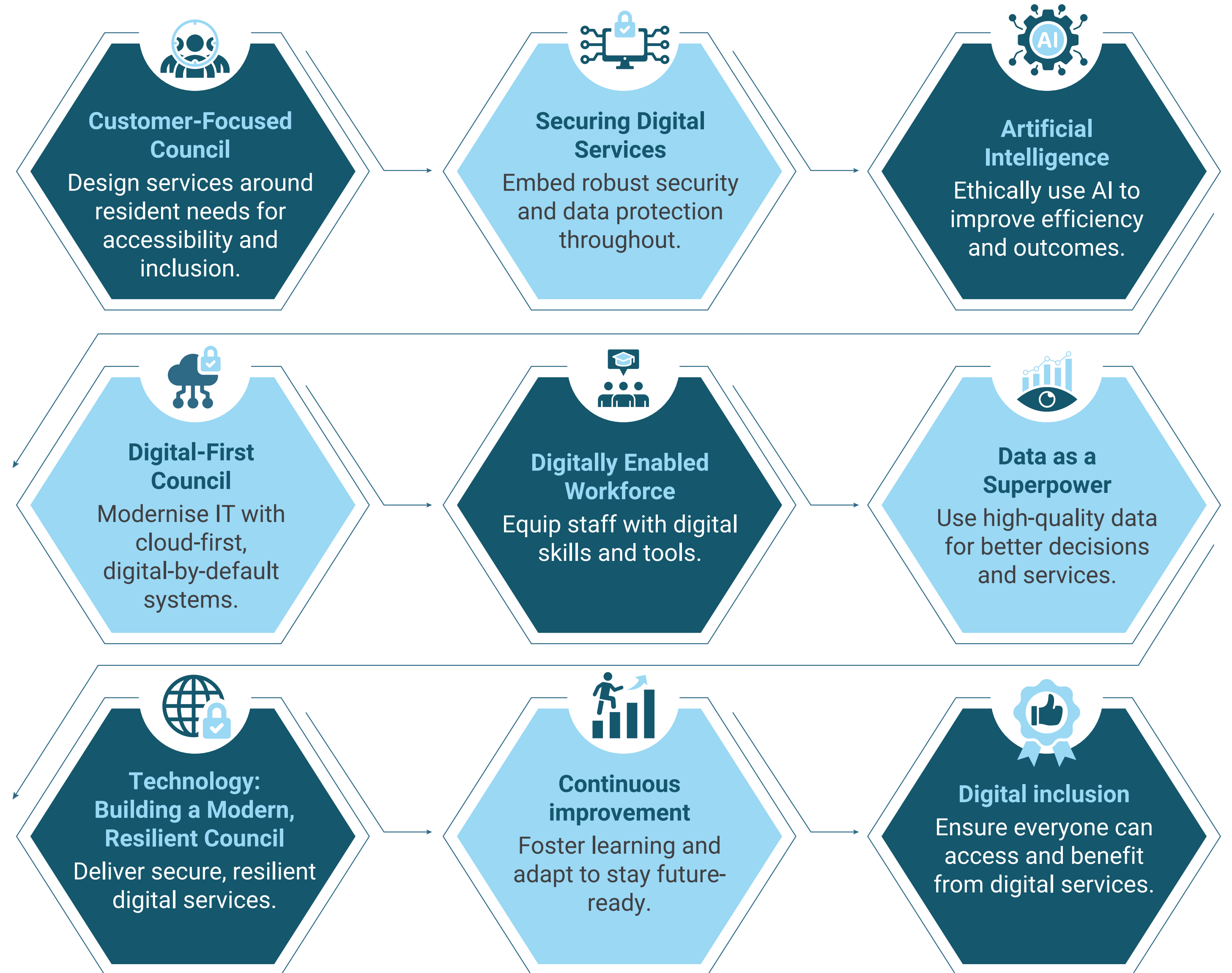
Central to the board's governance is a set of digital solution design principles, developed to ensure every supplier and solution is assessed consistently – from early market engagement through procurement, project implementation, and ongoing contract management. This approach guarantees robust governance,

alignment, and value-added outcomes throughout the software development lifecycle.

The board oversees strategy delivery, prioritising outcomes, monitoring progress, and managing risks. It champions continuous improvement, digital skills, and data literacy, ensuring staff have the tools and training to thrive in a secure, digitally enabled environment.

By embedding these principles and a robust digital pipeline, the board ensures consistency, accessibility and compliance across all platforms. An annual review and stakeholder engagement strengthen service resilience and user experience for Colchester's staff and communities.

THE THEMES OF OUR STRATEGY



1



CUSTOMER-FOCUSED COUNCIL: COLCHESTER'S APPROACH

WHAT WE ARE GOING TO DO

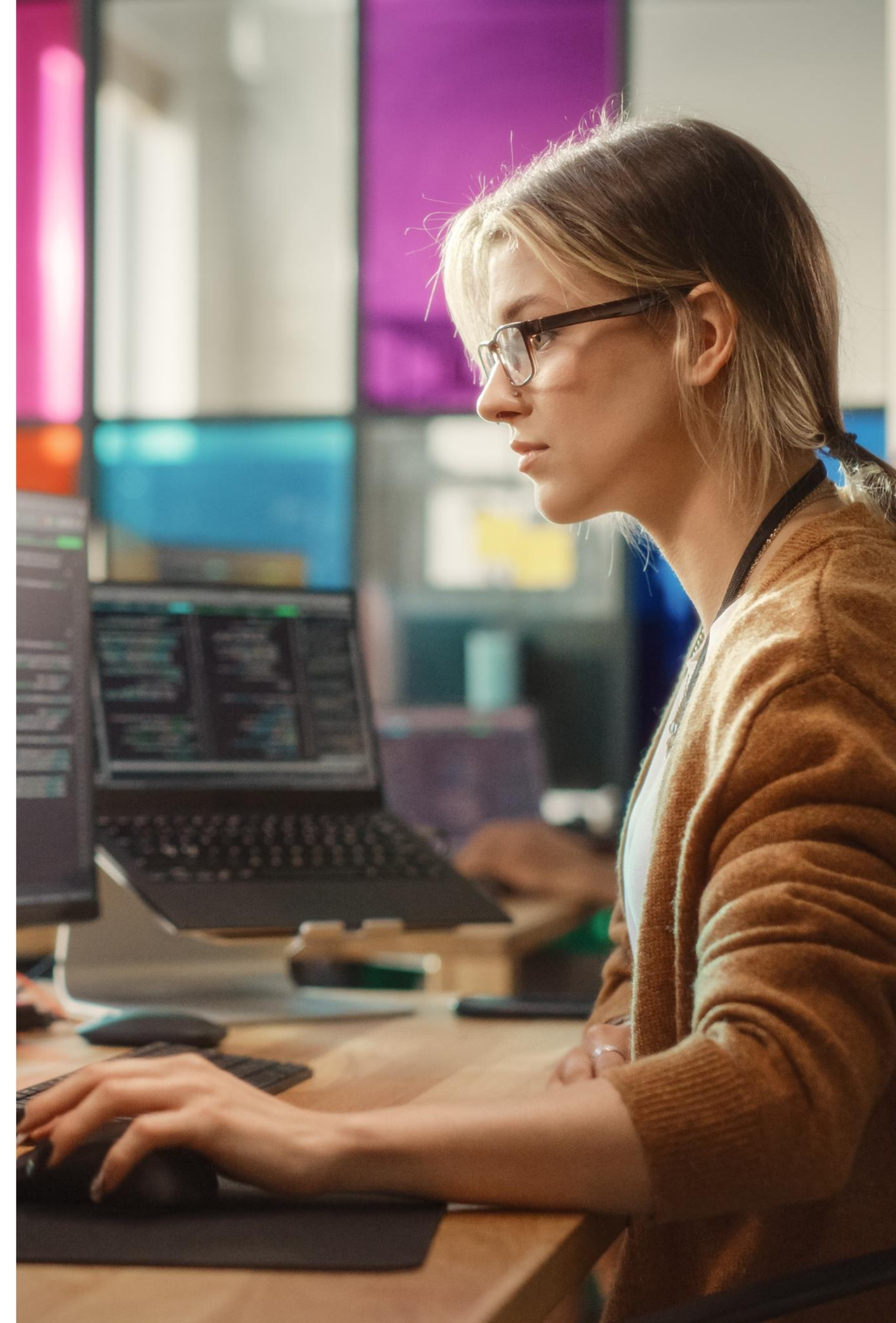
Colchester City Council will deliver high-quality, accessible digital services by setting clear standards for design and delivery.

We will use resident insight and feedback to shape services, prioritise digital inclusion and ensure support for all.

Our strategy streamlines processes, standardises delivery and shares best practice, driving continuous improvement and innovation across the council.

HOW WE ARE GOING TO DO IT

Resident feedback drives our priorities through panels and digital forums. Strong governance ensures accessibility and inclusive design. Consistency is achieved with reusable templates, while a culture of learning and innovation promotes shared ideas and best practice via blogs and knowledge hubs. Efficiency comes from streamlined contact points, first-time resolution, and clear signposting. Regular benchmarking against peers ensures continuous improvement and high standards.



2



SECURING DIGITAL SERVICES

WHAT WE ARE GOING TO DO

We are strengthening Colchester's digital defences to keep services safe, secure and resilient. We align with Essex Digital Partnership standards, including recovery plans and joint governance for rapid threat response. Systems are checked against national frameworks like the Cyber Assessment Framework to ensure compliance and continuous improvement. Every service is 'secure by design', incorporating zero-trust principles and ethical safeguards. We work with other councils to protect data and enable smarter services, while reviewing, testing, and adapting to stay ahead of emerging risks.

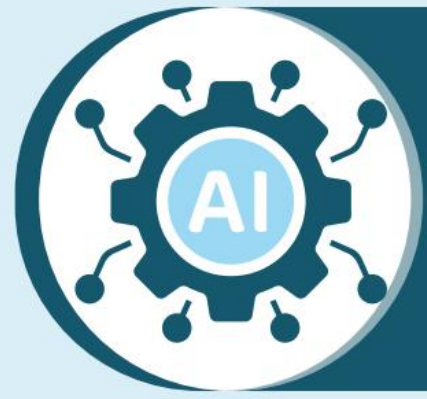
HOW WE ARE GOING TO DO IT

Strengthen cyber security by appointing a specialist to lead improvements, coordinate incident response, and deliver a 12-month roadmap to reduce risk and embed secure practices. All staff will receive accredited training through a funded plan. We align with Essex Digital Partnership standards, industry best practice, and national frameworks, regularly assessing against the Cyber Assessment

Framework, National Cyber Security Centre guidance, and Public Services Network requirements. Every new service will be secure by design with zero-trust principles, ethical safeguards and mandatory multi-factor authentication. Cross-authority governance, continuous benchmarking, and collaboration will ensure resilience, compliance and safe data sharing.



3



ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

WHAT WE ARE GOING TO DO

Artificial Intelligence offers a major opportunity to transform how Colchester City Council operates and supports its workforce. Building on a successful trial of Microsoft Copilot, we aim to boost efficiency and innovate service delivery while ensuring AI use remains ethical, transparent and under human oversight. Guided by national best practice, including the UK Government's AI Playbook, we are committed to creating an AI-literate workforce, streamlining operations and fostering innovation across the council.

HOW WE ARE GOING TO DO IT

We will create a Centre of Excellence to lead responsible AI adoption, trial solutions that boost efficiency and innovation, and deliver better outcomes for residents. An AI Ethics Board, guided by the UK Government's AI Playbook, will ensure transparency and fairness. We will engage staff, residents and partners, invest in training to build an AI-literate workforce, and prioritise energy-efficient technologies aligned with climate goals. AI tools will enhance customer interactions, workflows and case management, making Colchester agile, efficient and ready for Local Government Reorganisation.



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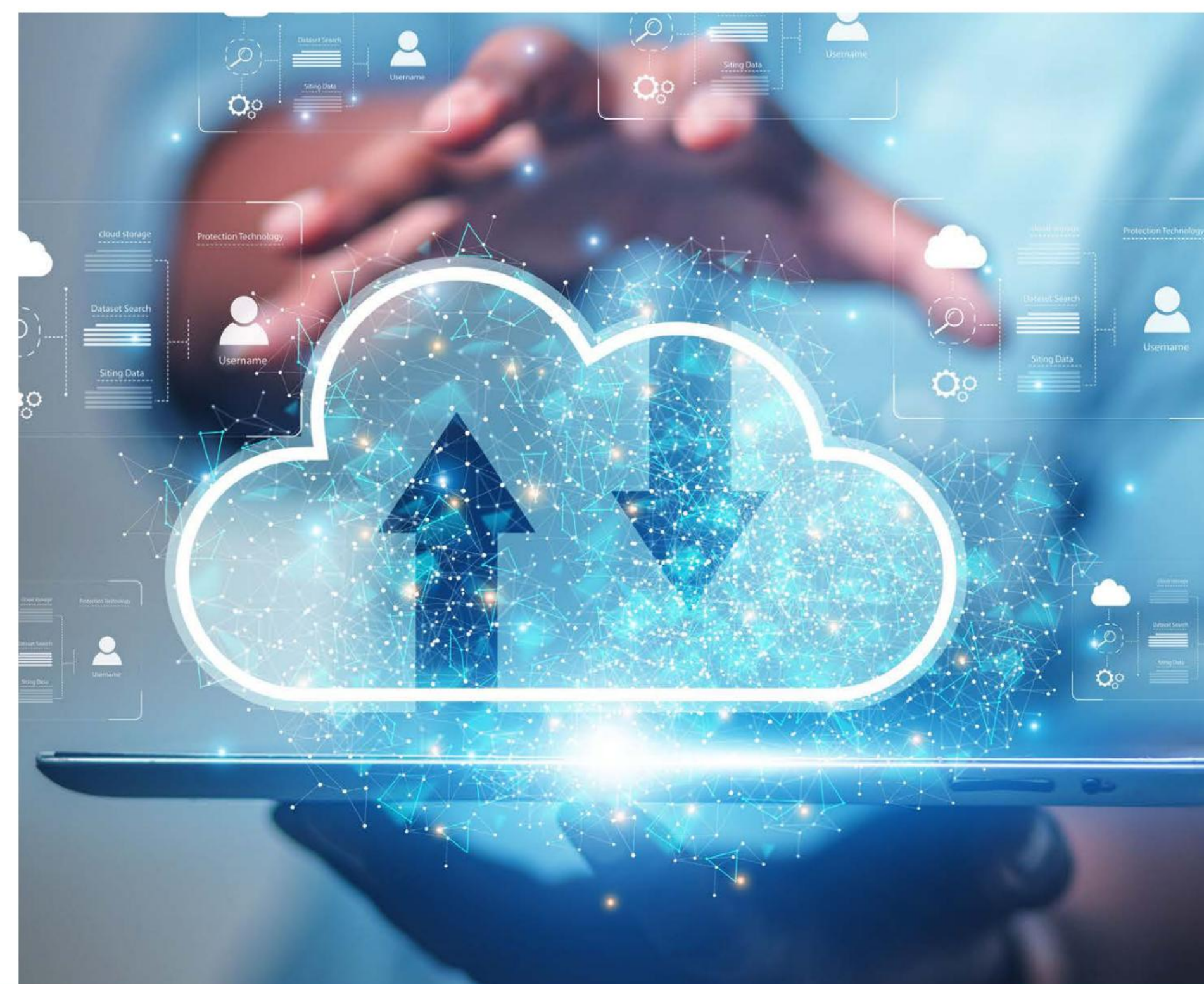
DIGITAL FIRST COUNCIL

WHAT WE ARE GOING TO DO

We're using data, digital tools, AI and new technology to make services simpler, accessible and designed around customer needs. This approach reduces costs, improves efficiency and enhances support. Behind the scenes, we're equipping staff with the right tools to work smarter and deliver great service.

HOW WE ARE GOING TO DO IT

Colchester is adopting a cloud-first approach to modernise IT systems, making them secure, resilient and future-ready. This shift improves reliability, reduces infrastructure costs and is overseen by the new Digital Pipeline Board, ensuring every technology decision aligns with strategic goals and delivers value. Cybersecurity is embedded at every layer, while staff gain continuous learning to stay ahead of emerging technologies. By optimising existing systems and licences and shaping procurement around digital priorities, we deliver best value and prepare for Local Government Reorganisation.





DIGITALLY ENABLED WORKFORCE

WHAT WE ARE GOING TO DO

We will equip our workforce with the digital skills, tools and confidence to deliver excellent services in a secure, digital-first environment. Through peer learning, mentoring and regular assessments, we will foster a culture of innovation and adaptability. By attracting and retaining talent, supporting continuous development and showcasing best practice, every colleague will be ready to lead Colchester's digital transformation.

HOW WE ARE GOING TO DO IT

Colchester will equip staff with essential digital skills through targeted training, peer learning and mentoring to foster innovation and adaptability. Regular skills assessments will tailor support for all roles. We will attract and retain digital talent, partnering with Colchester Institute and Essex University on apprenticeships and T Level projects to upskill the local community. Internal best practice will be

showcased through events and knowledge hubs, while leaders champion digital behaviours and continuous development. Digital growth will be embedded in performance frameworks, and knowledge sharing with neighbouring authorities and the Essex Digital Partnership will support readiness for Local Government Reorganisation.





DATA AS A SUPERPOWER

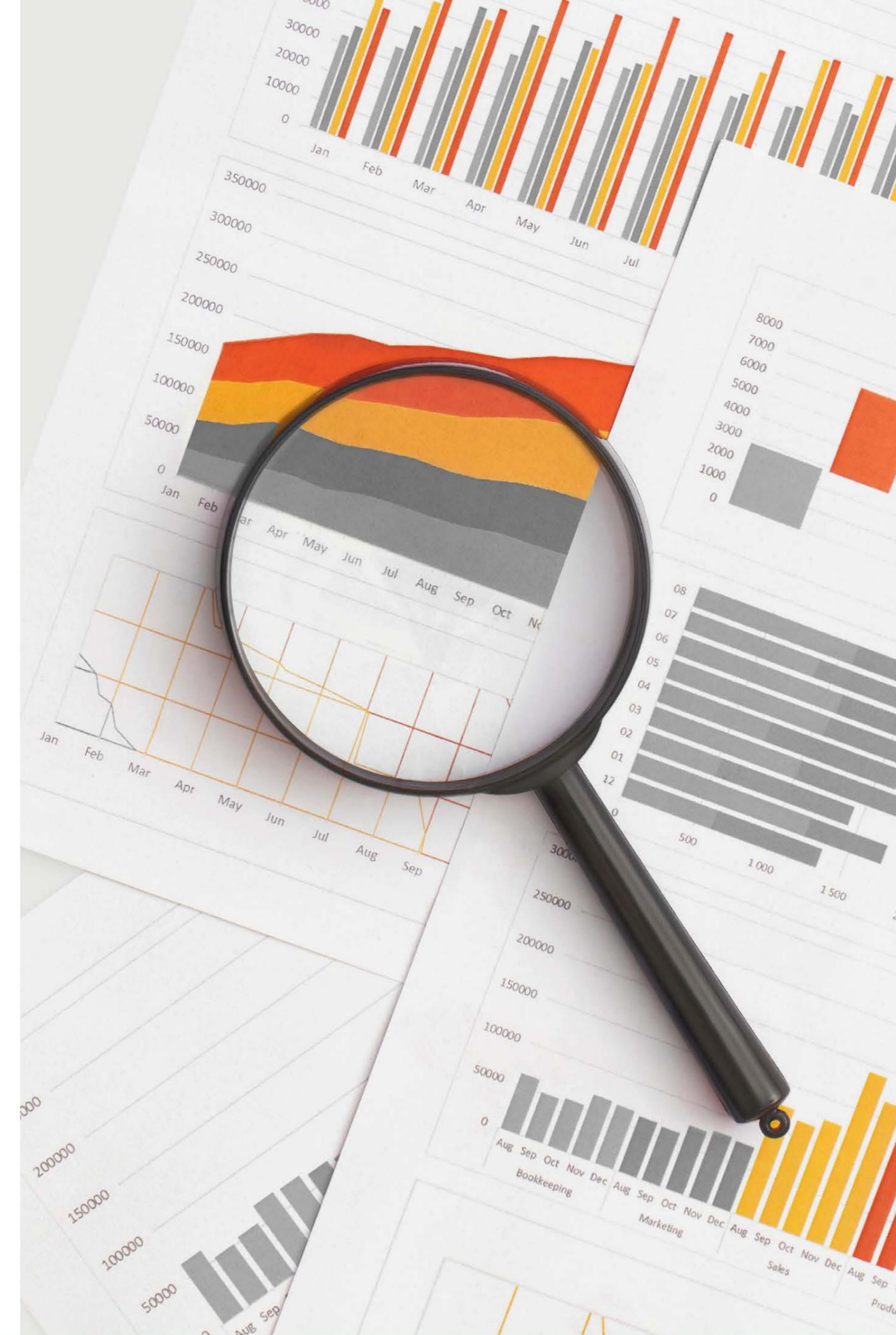
WHAT WE ARE GOING TO DO

We aim to unlock the potential of data to drive better decisions and improve services by making it accessible, accurate and responsibly shared. Security and privacy will remain paramount, while shared data and analytics will power service enhancements. All activity will fully comply with Local Government Reorganisation standards.

HOW WE ARE GOING TO DO IT

We will apply FAIR principles (Findability, Accessibility, Interoperability, Reusability) to make data easy to find, share and use. A federated model will enable secure collaboration and meet Local Government Reorganisation standards, with all practices aligned to UK data standards and the Data Ethics Framework for transparency and public benefit.

Clear governance, defined roles and regular quality checks will maintain compliance. Every digital solution will be assessed against these principles, with DPIAs for risk management. We will ensure Information Governance and Compliance standards, embedding privacy by design and protecting information throughout its lifecycle.





TECHNOLOGY: BUILDING A MODERN, RESILIENT COUNCIL

WHAT WE ARE GOING TO DO

We will modernise Colchester's technology infrastructure through a robust digital pipeline, overseen by the Digital Pipeline Board and guided by clear design principles. This will deliver cloud-first, secure, evergreen, and secure-by-design services, supporting Local Government Reorganisation and enabling technology sharing and collaboration with neighbouring authorities.

HOW WE ARE GOING TO DO IT

We will deliver a responsive, customer-focused IT service that empowers our workforce to use technology effectively. By adopting a product lifecycle approach, we will keep solutions fit for purpose and delivering value throughout their life. Technology will also drive digital inclusion, literacy, and collaboration for staff and communities.

We will refresh the IT service catalogue, embed secure-by-design and cloud-first principles, and keep systems evergreen and resilient. Collaboration with neighbouring authorities will support Local Government Reorganisation and regional priorities. The Digital Pipeline Board will guide investment and implementation to align with strategic goals. Ongoing training will ensure staff maximise the benefits of inclusive, accessible solutions.





WHAT WE ARE GOING TO DO

Continuous improvement will be embedded as a mindset, driving learning, adaptation and innovation across all digital services. Working with the Essex Digital Partnership and neighbouring authorities, we will align with regional ambitions and prepare for Local Government Reorganisation opportunities. Through feedback loops, benchmarking and staff-led enhancements, our services will remain responsive, inclusive and future-ready.

HOW WE ARE GOING TO DO IT

We will use data-driven service reviews to target areas with the greatest impact. Rapid prototyping and digital trials will test ideas in real settings, enabling quick learning and scaling of what works. Structured lessons-learned sessions will share insights across teams, while staff-led innovation sprints will surface practical improvements. Open feedback channels and regular benchmarking will keep progress transparent and aligned with sector standards. Our approach will remain flexible, adapting when data or feedback shows a better way forward. Collaboration with the Essex Digital Partnership and neighbouring authorities will ensure best practice sharing and alignment as we move towards Local Government Reorganisation.



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DIGITAL INCLUSION

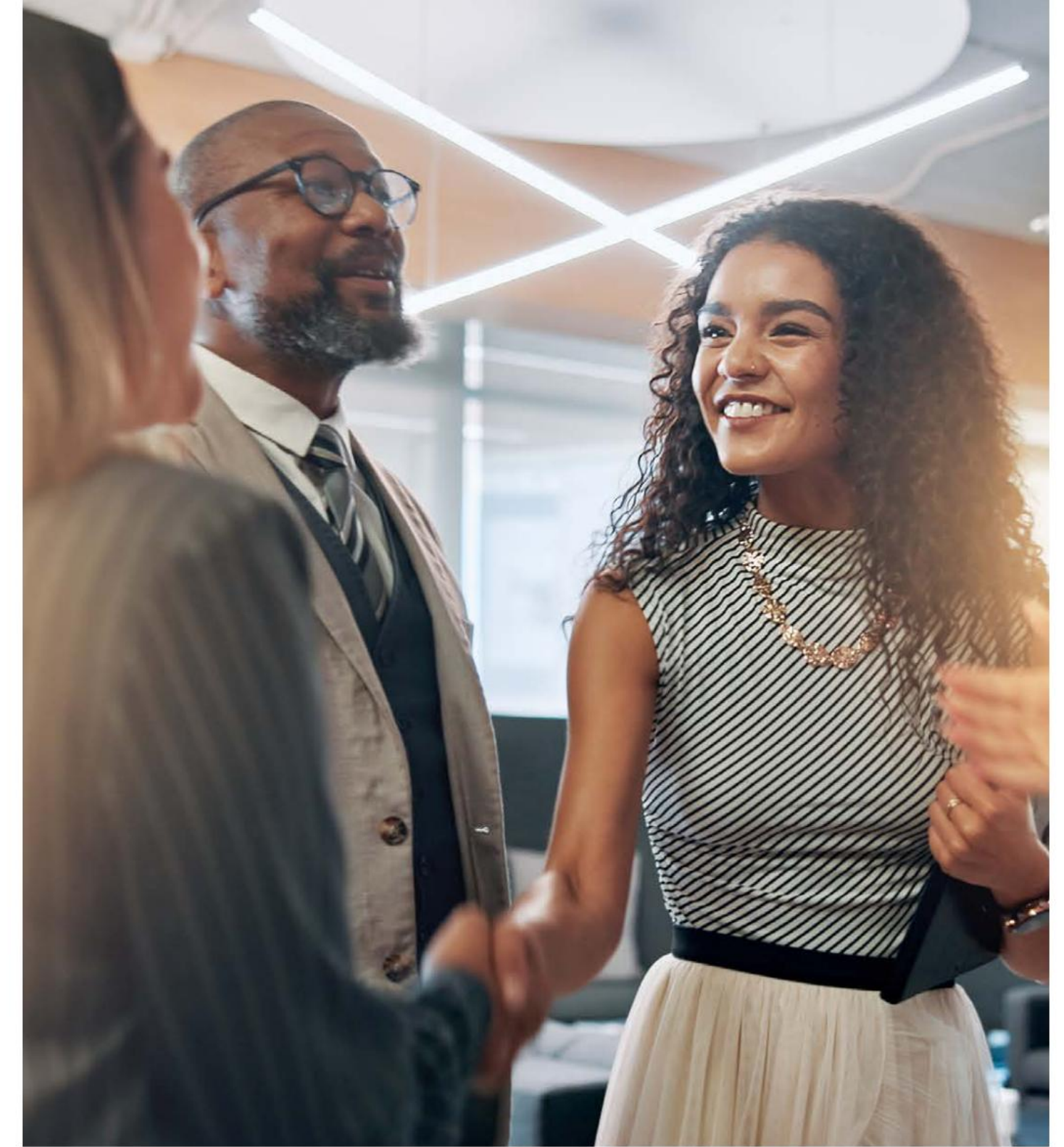
WHAT WE ARE GOING TO DO

We will make digital inclusion a core principle, ensuring all residents can access and benefit from our services. By working with the Essex Digital Partnership, neighbouring authorities and community partners, we will remove barriers, build confidence and create a more connected, inclusive Colchester.

HOW WE ARE GOING TO DO IT

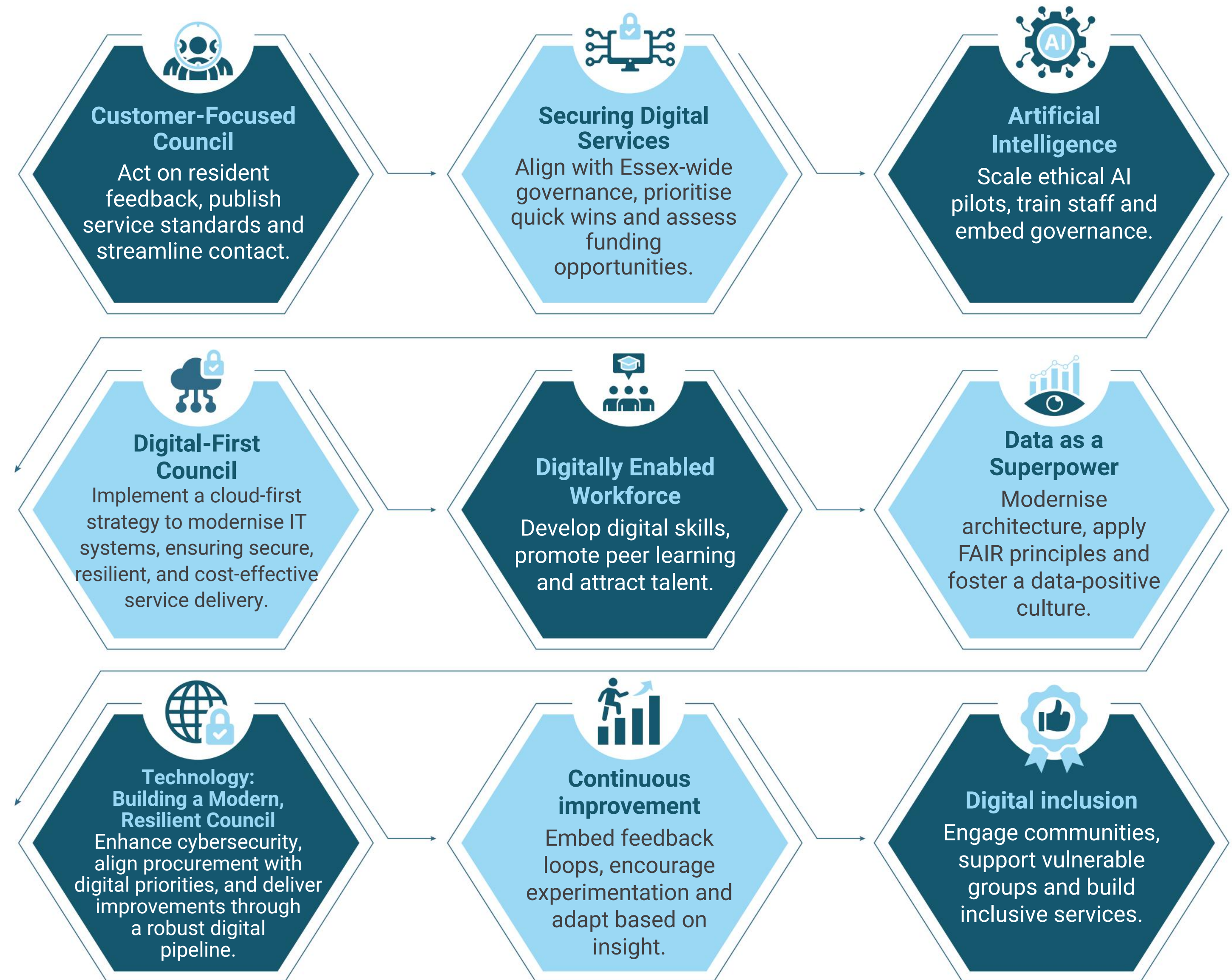
We will expand access through libraries, hubs and mobile outreach, and provide tailored digital skills support for those most at risk. A Digital Inclusion Network will unite partners, share learning and increase reach and effectiveness. Residents will shape services through co-design and feedback channels, while accessibility standards are embedded in all design and procurement.

Awareness campaigns will promote digital participation and reduce stigma. Data will identify excluded groups and target support where it's needed most. We will pursue funding, including the Digital Inclusion Innovation Fund, to scale initiatives. Inclusive design will be built into our new website and contact centre from the outset.



BRINGING THE STRATEGY TOGETHER: WHAT'S NEXT

Our digital strategy sets the direction for a modern, inclusive and resilient council. We will deliver this through coordinated governance, regional collaboration and a focus on measurable outcomes. The next phase is about turning ambition into action — prioritising delivery, engaging stakeholders and embedding continuous improvement.





Colchester
City Council

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