

EQIA Submission – ID Number

Section A

EQIA Title

Kent County Council Digital Strategy 2024-27

Responsible Officer

Sylvia Holman - DCED T

Type of Activity

Service Change

No

Service Redesign

No

Project/Programme

No

Commissioning/Procurement

No

Strategy/Policy

Strategy/Policy

Details of other Service Activity

No

Accountability and Responsibility

Directorate

Strategic and Corporate Services

Responsible Service

Digital Transformation/Technology

Responsible Head of Service

Dave Lindsay - DCED T

Responsible Director

Lisa Gannon - DCED T

Aims and Objectives

Aims and objectives

The Digital Strategy 2024-27 is being developed to serve as an overarching framework that encompasses our current and future digitally focused strategies and policies. These include the Digital Accessibility Strategy, the Digital Skills Strategy, the Technology Strategy, the Data Strategy and various directorate level digital strategies. The Digital Strategy focuses on how we can exploit technology to support and facilitate better digital experiences.

It is intended that this EqlA will cover all these strategies, although specific EqlAs will still be required for specific activities.

Our vision is to ensure that “People’s digital experiences of KCC are accessible, inclusive, clear, trusted and designed with the user in mind to make their experience as positive as possible. They leave feeling confident, empowered and respected.”

Our mission is to securely and ethically utilise technology, tools, and information to enhance our services, making them faster, more cost-effective, more environmentally friendly and ultimately providing our staff with the means to deliver a better, more streamlined experience for our residents and Kent businesses that we support. We will do this by integrating technology, in a user centred way, into our operations, revolutionising the way our staff work and present services to our residents.

The strategy has four strategic ambitions (SA):

- (SA1) Improve residents' digital experience: Provide easier digital access to council services that are designed around the resident, taking a user-centred approach and maximising accessibility and inclusion.
- (SA2) Simple secure and sharable: We want to keep it simple and use one secure tool for the job. We will rationalise our technology and use the technology we have over and over again.
- (SA3) Well used and used well: Support colleagues to make the best, fullest use of the tools and technologies available to them, developing high levels of digitally skilled collaboration.
- (SA4) Data led: We want our data to be embedded, accessible and reliable so that we can maximise the use of the data we collect to better inform our decision making and efficiency.

The strategy is being co-produced with staff across KCC.

Summary of key findings:

This equality impact assessment suggests that overall, the implementation of the strategy will have a positive impact on those with protected characteristics by taking a user-centred approach and maximising accessibility and inclusion. Adopting user-centred design methodologies when designing digital services will help combat digital exclusion by engaging with and involving groups at risk of digital exclusion in service redesign.

Whilst our Digital Strategy should ensure that our digital channels are as accessible as possible, there may be individuals who are still unable to benefit from improvement to our digital channels due to digital exclusion.

Staff will be supported, helping them to make the best, fullest use of the tools and technologies available to them. The Digital Accessibility Team will be consulted.

Equality recommendations:

- The Digital Strategy document is an accessible document
- Images and language used in the document are representative and inclusive
- Further equality analysis be conducted on specific digital transformation activity

Section B – Evidence

Do you have data related to the protected groups of the people impacted by this activity?

Yes

It is possible to get the data in a timely and cost effective way?

Yes

Is there national evidence/data that you can use?

Yes

Have you consulted with stakeholders?

Yes

Who have you involved, consulted and engaged with?

The strategy has been co—produced with KCC staff, with 2,700 colleagues being invited to contribute.

Extensive stakeholder engagement inviting contribution from across the organisation has taken place, including but not limited to:

- Digital steering group and working group
- Key stakeholders identified by members of the Digital Steering Group
- Directorate digital and systems/tech groups/boards (e.g. GET Directorate Tech Board, ASCH Digital Group, CYPE Systems board)
- Directorate PMOs (who will be essential in helping us deliver our ambitions)
- Digital champions networks (100+ people on call inviting contribution, 300+ on Teams site directly contacted)
- Corporate colleagues (e.g. HR/OD, SPRCA etc.)
- External (free of charge) consultancy – Gartner, SOCITM
- EQIA advice
- Leadership group T200
- Staff Group Chairs who then invited contributions from their groups

Has there been a previous Equality Analysis (EQIA) in the last 3 years?

No

Do you have evidence that can help you understand the potential impact of your activity?

Yes

Section C – Impact

Who may be impacted by the activity?

Service Users/clients

Service users/clients

Staff

Staff/Volunteers

Residents/Communities/Citizens

Residents/communities/citizens

Are there any positive impacts for all or any of the protected groups as a result of the activity that you are doing?

Yes

Details of Positive Impacts

Age

Older people are more likely to be digitally excluded through choice and can be less confident in using the internet (see p3 Digital Exclusion in Kent, June 2021). It is also important to bear in mind that disability and age are closely related, with older people more likely to have a disability, long term illness or impairment.

Regarding young people, it is often presumed that as digital natives, they won't be digitally excluded but many younger people lack the necessary skills for employment. Those from lower socio-economic backgrounds are also "less likely to have access to digital devices and to share devices between people in the household and use mobile data instead of a broadband connection" (see p10 Digital Exclusion in Kent, June 2021)

There is also evidence that young LGBTQ+ people experience higher levels of homelessness and poverty than heterosexual, cisgender people. This has a significant effect on digital inclusion, particularly during Covid-19 when many public facilities – like libraries or community centres – were closed due to lockdown (see How do LGBTQ+ people experience the digital divide(s) - Good Things Foundation).

See supplementary information for data on breakdown by age for Kent population and KCC workforce.

The strategy:

(SA1) Adopting user-centred design methodologies when designing digital services will help combat digital

exclusion by engaging with and involving groups at risk of digital exclusion in service redesign. Developing a more robust approach to enforcing the digital accessibility guidelines will help those older struggling to access our services say, through the inability to control the font size through their browser or use custom screen magnification software due to our websites or apps not being built to the required digital accessibility standards.

As stated in Framing Kents Future (p11): “We recognise that a digital-first approach will not be suitable for everyone, and we will continue to provide other options where these are needed, while supporting people who cannot access digital options, for example due to lack of skills and confidence or due to digital poverty, to be able to use digital options if possible.”

Disability

According to the 2021 census, 17.6% of people in Kent consider that they have a long-term health problem or disability (p 3, Kent Analytics- Disability in Kent May 2022). People with certain disabilities are more likely to be digitally excluded if websites and apps are not built to required accessibility standards or if they don't have access to the necessary software or digital tools to help them access online services.

For example, where websites or systems are not correctly configured:

- a user with a visual impairment may not be able to use screen reader software to read aloud content,
- a user who struggles to use their fingers may not be able to use voice controls to complete an online form,
- users with sensory processing difficulties may not be able to adjust how content is displayed so that they can engage with it more easily (e.g. turning off any animations, changing the background colour behind text),
- and a user who is Deaf may not be able to understand the content of a video posted on our Twitter account if there are no captions or British Sign Language interpretation.

In terms of staff members, 4.5% have declared that they have a disability (see Table 1, KCC Annual Equality and Diversity Report 2021-22). Insight about the specific nature of any barriers to accessibility is more limited but this figure (4.5%) shows that pro-active consideration of accessibility and how this is embedded in our digital tools and systems is likely to be significant.

We also need to take into consideration that some staff may have an undisclosed disability, underlying the importance of our core digital offering being accessible by design.

The strategy:

(SA1) We will develop a more robust approach to enforcing our digital accessibility guidelines so that we can meet and exceed our accessibility standards across both our resident facing platforms and the systems our staff engage with

(SA3) Well used and used well: Support colleagues to make the best, fullest use of the tools and technologies available to them, developing high levels of digitally skilled collaboration. The Digital Accessibility Team will be consulted.

Sex

ONS data suggests that men as a group are slightly less likely to be digitally excluded than women (Men: Women ratio on digital exclusion is 0.92 - see Table 5 Digital exclusion and equality in the UK - Office for National Statistics (ons.gov.uk)), where digital exclusion means someone has not used the internet in the past three months.

See supplementary information for data on breakdown by sex for Kent population and KCC workforce.

The strategy:

(SA1) Adopting user-centred design methodologies when designing digital services will help combat digital exclusion by engaging with and involving groups at risk of digital exclusion in service redesign.

Our vision is to ensure that “People’s digital experiences of KCC are accessible, inclusive, clear, trusted and designed with the user in mind to make their experience as positive as possible. They leave feeling confident, empowered and respected.”

Sexual orientation

The digital divides that LGBTQ+ people experience are relatively under-researched, partly due to insufficient data collection.

See supplementary information for data on breakdown by gender identity, transgender and sexual orientation for Kent population and KCC workforce.

Gender identity/Transgender

By creating consistency across our digital estate, the needs of the transgender community best practice can proliferate whereby wherever possible, online forms utilise the same template that allows a range of titles and gender identities to be used such as Mr, Miss, Mrs, Mx or enter their own title and for gender identity can select from female, male or non-binary or enter a different gender identity.

The strategy:

(SA1) Adopting user-centred design methodologies when designing digital services will help combat digital exclusion by engaging with and involving groups at risk of digital exclusion in service redesign.

Our vision is to ensure that “People’s digital experiences of KCC are accessible, inclusive, clear, trusted and designed with the user in mind to make their experience as positive as possible. They leave feeling confident, empowered and respected.”

Race

Across the ethnic groups for which breakdowns were available, the proportion of people who have either never used the internet or have not used it in the last three months came down between 2011 and 2018. In 2011, there were wide disparities in recent internet use among the different ethnic groups, however, in 2018, this gap had narrowed. This is particularly the case for adults of Bangladeshi ethnicity. In 2011, 31.4% of them were internet non-users, higher than the figure for UK adults overall (20.3%). In 2018, the figure for Bangladeshi internet non-users had dropped to 8.0%.

Adults of Bangladeshi ethnicity are still 4.76 times more likely to be digitally excluded than those of White ethnicity, followed by adults of Pakistani ethnicity (3.81 times more likely to be digitally excluded) than those of Indian ethnicity (1.59 times more likely to be digitally excluded).

Those of Black, African, Caribbean or Black British ethnicity are 1.36 times more likely to be digitally excluded than adults of White ethnicity, and for those of Chinese or other Asian ethnicity, the ratio is 1.11. Adults of mixed or multiple ethnic groups are less likely to be digital excluded than those of White ethnicity

(ratio is 0.54), as are adults of any other ethnic group (0.90) (see Digital exclusion and equality in the UK - Office for National Statistics (ons.gov.uk) - January 2023).

There are also economic and financial barriers to digital inclusion that disproportionately affect some minority ethnic groups. “The UK Office for National Statistics has shown that, on entering the pandemic, minority ethnic groups (particularly Black African and other Black ethnic groups) had lower financial resilience than people identifying as White British and White other; Pakistani and Bangladeshi ethnic groups were more likely than White British individuals to report a worsening financial situation between 2019, and April, 2020” (see Digital first during the COVID-19 pandemic: does ethnicity matter? - The Lancet Public Health- August 2021)

Digital connectivity is a major challenge faced by refugees and people seeking asylum in the UK. Many organisations that once offered a mixture of online and in-person access have moved entirely online. These developments have created a ‘digital gap’. A lack of proper devices and digital literacy, combined with language barriers and internet access costs, exacerbates isolation and social and economic exclusion (see Reducing Digital Exclusion For Refugees And People Seeking Asylum In The UK - Refugee Action (refugee-action.org.uk) August 2022).

See supplementary information for data on breakdown by ethnic group for Kent population and KCC workforce.

The strategy:

(SA1) Adopting user-centred design methodologies when designing digital services will help combat digital exclusion by engaging with and involving groups at risk of digital exclusion in service redesign.

Our vision is to ensure that “People’s digital experiences of KCC are accessible, inclusive, clear, trusted and designed with the user in mind to make their experience as positive as possible. They leave feeling confident, empowered and respected.”

Carer’s responsibilities

According to the Kent Adult Carers’ Strategy 2022 to 2027, an estimated 148,341 adults aged 16 and over provide unpaid care each week, with just under a quarter of these providing 50 hours of care or more a week.

The Digital Strategy aims to increase the availability and accessibility of services, which should provide increased flexibility for carers. However, some studies show that carers (in particular full-time carers) are less likely to be comfortable using digital services and more likely to say they don’t have any or enough digital devices.

Research by Carers UK shows that older carers are more likely to be digital excluded as are those who are not in employment. When asked what the main barriers are that prevent older people from using online support services, the most reported barrier was having a lack of confidence about how to use technology (88%), followed by a preference for face-to-face, telephone or postal contact (87%) and a lack of knowledge about how to use technology (83%) (see Supporting older carers who are digitally excluded – Carers UK (August 2023)).

See supplementary information for more data on the provision of unpaid care in the Kent population.

The strategy:

(SA1) Adopting user-centred design methodologies when designing digital services will help combat digital exclusion by engaging with and involving groups at risk of digital exclusion in service redesign.

Our vision is to ensure that “People’s digital experiences of KCC are accessible, inclusive, clear, trusted and designed with the user in mind to make their experience as positive as possible. They leave feeling confident, empowered, and respected.”

Other relevant characteristics:

Research suggests that the following groups are also more likely to be digital excluded than others (see p6 digitalkent.uk/resources/detail/kent-digital-exclusion-reports-june-2021-537) :

- People without a job
- People in social housing
- People with fewer educational qualifications
- People living in rural areas
- People whose first language is not English

Socioeconomic (deprivation)

Affordability limits many people’s access to the Internet and digital technology. From a survey conducted by Kent County Council, the top reason for people having limited access to the Internet and digital devices was due to affordability (56%). In addition, many people were sharing devices (24%). (see p5 digitalkent.uk/resources/detail/kent-digital-exclusion-reports-june-2021-537)

General commentary:

The delivery of the strategy document itself is not expected to have a direct impact on people, however it will be used to give a steer to upcoming projects/strategies with a digital element within its 2024-27 lifespan which could have an impact. Each of these projects/strategies would be expected to have their own Equalities Impact Assessment as required.

S.A1. Improve residents’ digital experience

It is important to ensure that online content including language and images used is engaging, appropriate and representative of all groups using a particular service.

In addition, KCC web content standards includes guidance on language usage e.g. using simple language and no jargon, so that it can be understood by people:

- with a low reading age (the average UK reading age is about 9 years old)
- whose first language is not English
- using screen reading devices

(SA4) Data Led

The strategy: We want our data to be embedded, accessible and reliable so that we can maximise the use of the data we collect to better inform our decision making and efficiency.

There is the potential positive impact on all protected groups to being Data Led.

If data on protected groups (i.e. special category data) is used sensibly and responsibly, then key trends can

be observed, and insights derived, which enable better service design and improved outcomes for people.

As an example, the EHRC is currently producing a case study on how Kent's use of AI actually supports the Public Sector Equality Duty. The takeaway is that when used properly, data can be a force for good for protected groups.

Negative impacts and Mitigating Actions

19.Negative Impacts and Mitigating actions for Age

Are there negative impacts for age?

Yes

Details of negative impacts for Age

(SA1 & SA2) Whilst our Digital Strategy should ensure that our digital channels are as accessible as possible, there may be individuals who are still unable to benefit from improvement to our digital channels due to digital exclusion.

Older people are more likely to be digitally excluded through choice and can be less confident in using the internet.

Regarding young people, it is often presumed that as digital natives, they won't be digitally excluded but many younger people lack the necessary skills for employment. Those who are digitally excluded may also be excluded from some of the benefits of digital service transformation.

There is evidence that young LGBTQ+ people experience higher levels of homelessness and poverty than heterosexual, cisgender people. This has a significant effect on digital inclusion, particularly during Covid-19 when many public facilities – like libraries or community centres – were closed due to lockdown (see How do LGBTQ+ people experience the digital divide(s) - Good Things Foundation).

(SA4) Modern data analytics often use digital tools which older people may have less experience of and may be less confident to use. This could impact service user's confidence and ability to communicate with us about how their data is used, and for staff who are required to work differently to gain the benefits of these new digital tools.

Mitigating Actions for Age

SA1 Adopting user-centred design methodologies when designing digital services will help combat digital exclusion by engaging with and involving groups at risk of digital exclusion in service redesign. Any learning will be passed on to service teams to inform planning for offline channels.

SA2 By utilising the same technologies for different parts of the council, those at risk of digital exclusion will find it easier to transfer any digital skills they gain from one part of the council to another, rather than need to learn how to navigate multiple platforms and technologies.

SA3 & SA4 Internally within KCC, training and development will be provided to support colleagues to make the best, fullest use of the tools and technologies available to them, including using modernising our use of data. Communication will be tailored to support all individuals to understand how we use their data and what their rights are in relation to this.

We will work closely with Digital Kent to decrease digital exclusion across the county by removing the barriers faced by those experiencing digital exclusion.

Responsible Officer for Mitigating Actions – Age

Dave Lindsay

20. Negative impacts and Mitigating actions for Disability
Are there negative impacts for Disability?
Yes
Details of Negative Impacts for Disability
<p>Whilst our Digital Strategy should ensure that our digital channels are as accessible as possible, there may be individuals who are still unable to benefit from improvement to our digital channels due to digital exclusion.</p> <p>People with certain disabilities are more likely to be digitally excluded if websites and apps are not built to required accessibility standards or if they don't have access to the necessary software or digital tools to help them access online services. Those who are digitally excluded may also be excluded from some of the benefits of digital service transformation.</p>
Mitigating actions for Disability
<p>SA1 Adopting user-centred design methodologies when designing digital services will help combat digital exclusion by engaging with and involving groups at risk of digital exclusion in service redesign. Any learning will be passed on to service teams to inform planning for offline channels.</p> <p>SA1 We will develop a more robust approach to enforcing our digital accessibility guidelines so that we can meet and exceed our accessibility standards across both our resident facing platforms and the systems our staff engage with</p> <p>SA3 Well used and used well: Support colleagues to make the best, fullest use of the tools and technologies available to them, developing high levels of digitally skilled collaboration. The Digital Accessibility Team will be consulted.</p> <p>We will work closely with Digital Kent to decrease digital exclusion across the county by removing the barriers faced by those experiencing digital exclusion.</p>
Responsible Officer for Disability
Dave Lindsay
21. Negative Impacts and Mitigating actions for Sex
Are there negative impacts for Sex
No
Details of negative impacts for Sex
Not Applicable
Mitigating actions for Sex
Not Applicable
Responsible Officer for Sex
Not Applicable
22. Negative Impacts and Mitigating actions for Gender identity/transgender
Are there negative impacts for Gender identity/transgender
No
Negative impacts for Gender identity/transgender
Not Applicable
Mitigating actions for Gender identity/transgender
Not Applicable
Responsible Officer for mitigating actions for Gender identity/transgender
Not Applicable
23. Negative impacts and Mitigating actions for Race

Are there negative impacts for Race
Yes
Negative impacts for Race
<p>(SA1 & SA2) Whilst our Digital Strategy should ensure that our digital channels are as accessible as possible, there may be individuals who are still unable to benefit from improvement to our digital channels due to digital exclusion.</p> <p>Adults of Bangladeshi ethnicity are still 4.76 times more likely to be digitally excluded than those of White ethnicity, followed by adults of Pakistani ethnicity (3.81 times more likely to be digitally excluded) than those of Indian ethnicity (1.59 times more likely to be digitally excluded).</p> <p>Those of Black, African, Caribbean or Black British ethnicity are 1.36 times more likely to be digitally excluded than adults of White ethnicity, and for those of Chinese or other Asian ethnicity, the ratio is 1.11. Adults of mixed or multiple ethnic groups are less likely to be digital excluded than those of White ethnicity (ratio is 0.54), as are adults of any other ethnic group (0.90).</p> <p>Digital connectivity is a major challenge faced by refugees and people seeking asylum in the UK. A lack of proper devices and digital literacy, combined with language barriers and internet access costs, exacerbates isolation and social and economic exclusion.</p> <p>Those who are digitally excluded may also be excluded from some of the benefits of digital service transformation.</p> <p>(SA4) In terms of data, use of poor quality data could lead to poor outcomes and building unconscious bias into the analysis we undertake and the decisions we make. This is particularly pertinent to those from ethnically diverse communities as facial recognition systems such as those developed by Microsoft have shown to be up to 19% less accurate at recognising images of Black men and women compared to White individuals.</p>
Mitigating actions for Race
<p>SA1 Adopting user-centred design methodologies when designing digital services will help combat digital exclusion by engaging with and involving groups at risk of digital exclusion in service redesign. Any learning will be passed on to service teams to inform planning for offline channels.</p> <p>We will work closely with Digital Kent to decrease digital exclusion across the county by removing the barriers faced by those experiencing digital exclusion.</p> <p>SA2 By utilising the same technologies for different parts of the council, those at risk of digital exclusion will find it easier to transfer any digital skills they gain from one part of the council to another, rather than need to learn how to navigate multiple platforms and technologies.</p> <p>SA4 We will properly interrogate the how representative the data being used to generate analysis and support decision making and any automated (or supported) decision making should be taken in line with our Artificial Intelligence Policy. We will also robustly challenge the ethics principles behind our use of data which will be aligned with our statutory requirements and the Government's Data Ethics Framework.</p>
Responsible Officer for mitigating actions for Race
Dave Lindsay
24. Negative impacts and Mitigating actions for Religion and belief
Are there negative impacts for Religion and belief
No
Negative impacts for Religion and belief

Not Applicable
Mitigating actions for Religion and belief
Not Applicable
Responsible Officer for mitigating actions for Religion and Belief
Not Applicable
25. Negative impacts and Mitigating actions for Sexual Orientation
Are there negative impacts for Sexual Orientation
No
Negative impacts for Sexual Orientation
Not Applicable
Mitigating actions for Sexual Orientation
Not Applicable
Responsible Officer for mitigating actions for Sexual Orientation
Not Applicable
26. Negative impacts and Mitigating actions for Pregnancy and Maternity
Are there negative impacts for Pregnancy and Maternity
No
Negative impacts for Pregnancy and Maternity
Not Applicable
Mitigating actions for Pregnancy and Maternity
Not Applicable
Responsible Officer for mitigating actions for Pregnancy and Maternity
Not Applicable
27. Negative impacts and Mitigating actions for Marriage and Civil Partnerships
Are there negative impacts for Marriage and Civil Partnerships
No
Negative impacts for Marriage and Civil Partnerships
Not Applicable
Mitigating actions for Marriage and Civil Partnerships
Not Applicable
Responsible Officer for Marriage and Civil Partnerships
Not Applicable
28. Negative impacts and Mitigating actions for Carer's responsibilities
Are there negative impacts for Carer's responsibilities
Yes
Negative impacts for Carer's responsibilities
Some studies show that carers (in particular full-time carers) are less likely to be comfortable using digital services and more likely to say they don't have any or enough digital devices.
Research by Carers UK shows that older carers are more likely to be digital excluded as are those who are not in employment. When asked what the main barriers are that prevent older people from using online support services, the most reported barrier was having a lack of confidence about how to use technology (88%), followed by a preference for face-to-face, telephone or postal contact (87%) and a lack of knowledge about how to use technology (83%) (see Supporting older carers who are digitally excluded – Carers UK (August 2023)).
Those who are digitally excluded may also be excluded from some of the benefits of digital service transformation.
Mitigating actions for Carer's responsibilities
SA1 Adopting user-centred design methodologies when designing digital services will help combat digital

exclusion by engaging with and involving groups at risk of digital exclusion in service redesign. Any learning will be passed on to service teams to inform planning for offline channels.

SA2 By utilising the same technologies for different parts of the council, those at risk of digital exclusion will find it easier to transfer any digital skills they gain from one part of the council to another, rather than need to learn how to navigate multiple platforms and technologies.

We will work closely with Digital Kent to decrease digital exclusion across the county by removing the barriers faced by those experiencing digital exclusion.

Responsible Officer for Carer's responsibilities

Dave Lindsay