

# Information Strategy



2021 - 2024

## **Foreword by Councillor Ashley Cartman, Executive Member**

Similar to most organisations, having reliable access to quality information is critical to the basis of every decision we take. In order to make good decisions, we need to ensure that the information used to support those decisions is as rich, comprehensive and as accurate as we can make it. We also need to make sure that we can find it and that when we need it, it is accessible but only to those who should be able to see it.

As a public body we operate in an environment of transparency where there is an increasing level of expectation that we will simply publish information without waiting to be asked. This requires us to know in a great level of detail what we hold, where to find it and how to link it together so that it creates a complete picture.

Like many, the challenge we face is not to lose sight of the principles and practices of good information management in the face of the sheer quantity of information we generate in the modern day. Our investment in technology places us in an ideal situation to move forward in the post-Covid period, allowing our officers and members access to information wherever they happen to be working, and enshrine trust in the eyes of our residents that we can look after their personal information with the care it requires.



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## Executive Summary

In this digital world we are continually reminded of the need to have high quality information at our fingertips. The post-Covid world we inhabit will require us to operate very differently and we will rely even more on having efficient access to the information we hold to direct our strategic decision making, and to operate our services as efficiently as possible.

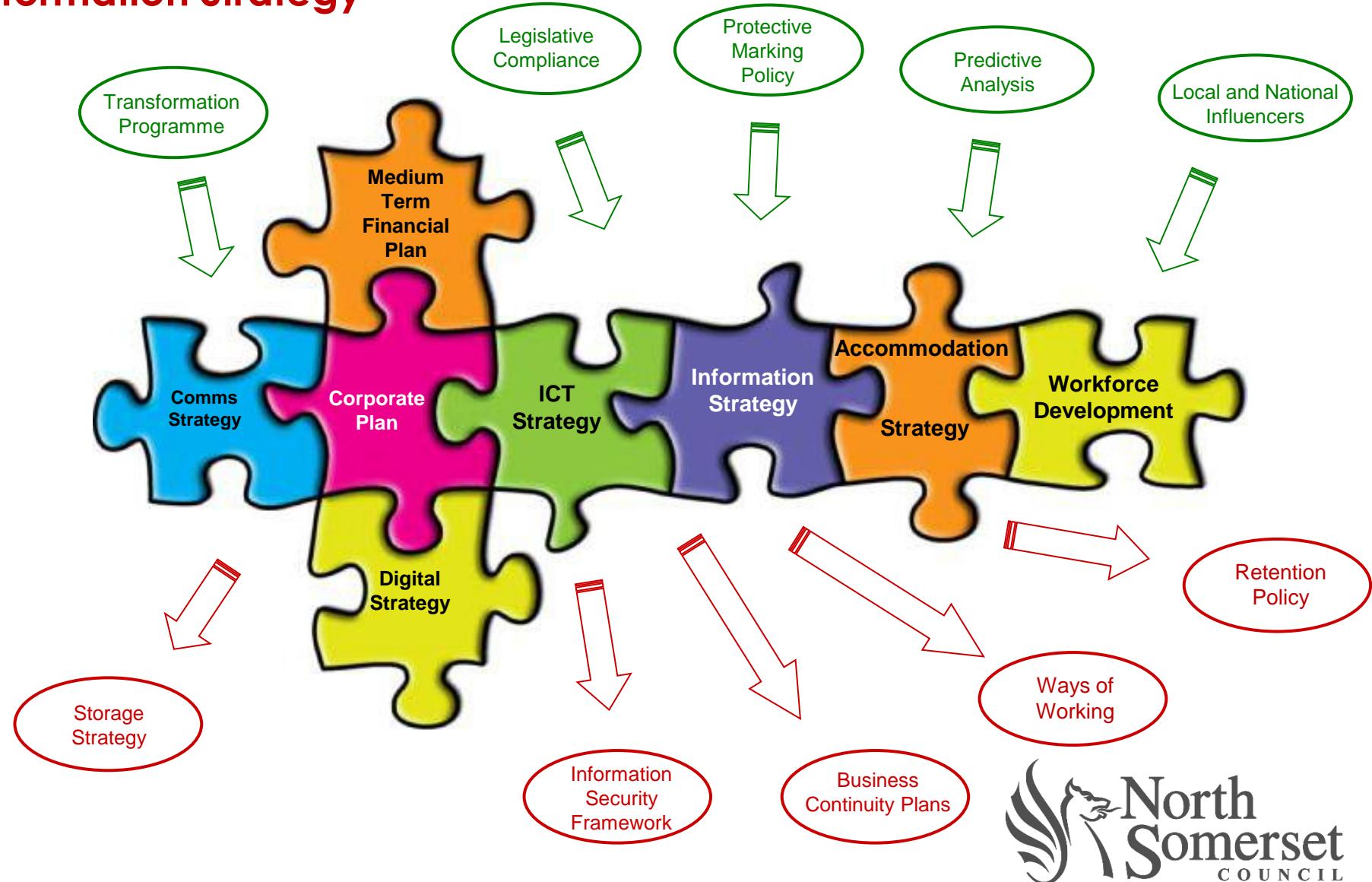
This strategy outlines the steps we will take that are necessary to improve the way we manage and use information. It introduces eight principles through which we will invest in technology and develop the key skills needed in the workforce over the next three years.

We recognise that we have a journey to make and it is one which will not be completed overnight, however some significant steps have already been taken, particularly in relation to some of the tools and technologies available to us.



# Positioning the Information Strategy

Whilst the Information Strategy sets out the priorities for improving the way we manage our information, it does not do so in isolation, instead forming one component of an overall set of strategies which collectively provides the complete picture for the development of information management across the council.

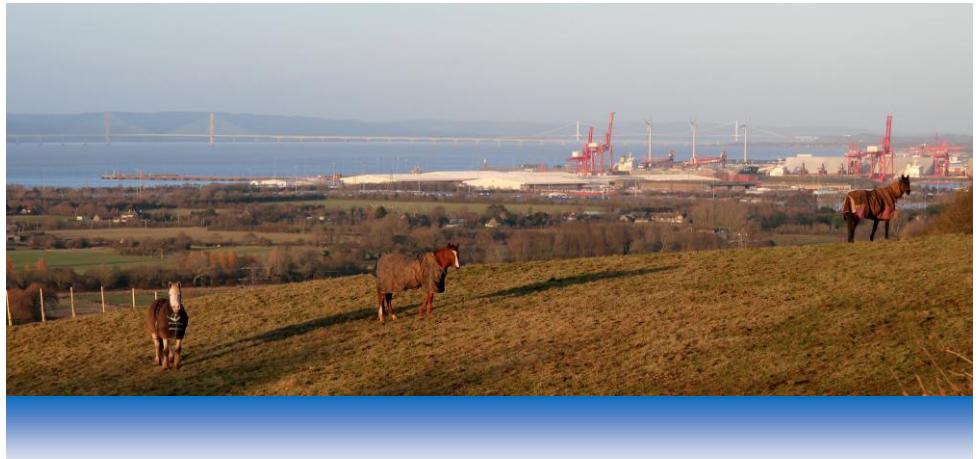


## Equality and diversity

We are committed to equality of opportunity in the provision of services and employment opportunities; we aim to create the best possible quality of life for all people who live in, work in or visit the area.

North Somerset is an area of increasing diversity which brings positive benefits to us all. It is essential that we consider this diversity to ensure everyone has equal chances to live, work, learn and feel part of a community free from prejudice, discrimination and harassment.

We use the information we hold to identify where we need to intervene or do something differently, and to understand the potential impact of our policies, services and functions on our residents and staff to make sure our services reflect the needs of our diverse community.

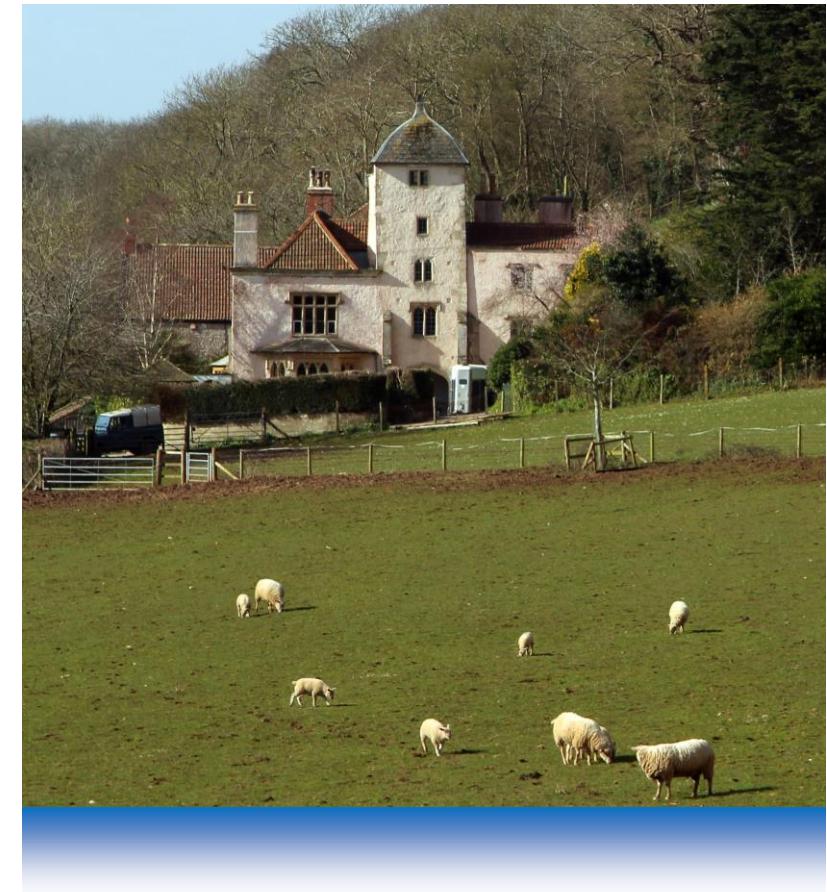


## Consultation and engagement

We are committed to ensuring that our organisation is open and engaging and that our residents and stakeholders are empowered to have their say in decision making.

Access to information underpins our commitment to ensure:

*...a menu of opportunities for residents and communities to engage at a level which suits them best. Wide-ranging informative and accessible communications with residents. Consistent, timely and good quality engagement in decisions, service design and financial planning. Best practice has become common practice*



## Summary of principles

1. I know what information we've got and where it is stored
2. I collaborate with others and share knowledge and information appropriately
3. I know how to protect information appropriately
4. I have the knowledge and skills to manage information
5. I know what is expected of me when creating information
6. I recognise the implications and risks of keeping information that we no longer use
7. I have the IT I need to manage information
8. I understand the value of the information we hold and how to exploit it



## I know what information we've got and where it is stored

Providing officers and members with **the right tools** for managing information and **training** them in their use will help everyone to know **what information** is available to them, **why it's being held, where it is stored** and **what we do with it**.



## We will:

- Reduce the volumes of information that we hold, only keeping information where there is a business need to do so, and in line with statutory requirements;
- Increase staff awareness of the information that they create, e.g. avoiding unnecessary emails and re-using information to avoid duplication;
- Increase the use of shared corporate repositories enabling quicker responses to Freedom of Information (FOI) requests and improving our understanding of what we hold and what can be made available to the public. This increases our ability to be open and transparent;
- Maintain our knowledge of the information held by the council through the **Information Asset Register (IAR)**;
- Ensure that appropriate retention schedules are applied and followed. We will securely dispose of information when we no longer require it;
- Find effective solutions for managing our paper holdings as well as our electronic information. Many areas of the council continue to hold some information on paper and certain parts of the business rely heavily on paper files;
- Maintain an electronic archive, making sure that we apply appropriate destruction dates, indexes and other relevant metadata, for efficient retrieval; and
- Recognise that websites and other online systems form part of our information resource and so also need to be effectively managed.



## **Current actions:**

1. Review the Information Asset Register originally created in 2018.
2. Map information assets against physical assets so that we can understand where our information is stored
3. Review retention schedule against the Information Asset Register
4. Relocate information we hold from the existing Agilisys private cloud into the Microsoft public cloud
5. Complete the interface between Teams (SharePoint) and Windows Explorer
6. Review e-training and incorporate content into an online portal
7. Inspections of the council's remaining archive stores.
8. Explore options for transfer of records archive
9. Communications plan delivered through Knowledge articles and 365 collaboration tools

## **Recognised Omissions to be Designed:**

- Electronic storage monitoring tool to provide management information for structured and unstructured data
- Structured hard copy file storage review
- Records management training
- Behaviour Campaigns
- Operational governance and charging mechanism
- Datashare / publication scheme



## I collaborate with others to share knowledge and information appropriately

We work openly and collaboratively, sharing information and knowledge with colleagues, partners, stakeholders and the public as appropriate. Information and knowledge are key service and corporate assets and we have a responsibility to share and re-use data to release value and maximise benefits.



**We advocate:**

- a risk-based approach to sharing to ensure information and knowledge are shared responsibly;
- active sharing and re-use of information to meet service need;
- sharing of appropriate information with the public to meet government commitments on transparency and accountability, facilitating the re-use of data to increase economic and social value.

We need to have a clearer picture of information sharing activities. **We must:**

- maintain common data sharing principles and agreements, and work to embed these across the council;
- maintain a clear picture of with whom we need to share information, such as stakeholders, partners or suppliers, in a responsible way;
- develop a clear picture of where information and knowledge resides and flows across the organisation.

## **Current actions:**

- Review all of our information sharing and processing agreements and map results against the information asset register
- Corporate Business Intelligence Team developing the skills to make use of advanced collaboration tools such as Flow and PowerBI to improve data flow around the council and with partners.
- Business Intelligence developing resident collaboration tools for information and data sharing.
- Extend the functionality of Microsoft Teams so that we can include external agencies in our virtual teams, sharing files with them as appropriate and working in collaboration on policies and plans.
- Strengthen planned initiatives for open data.
- Promote the use of public data on the website via the Publication Scheme.

## **Recognised Omissions to be Designed:**

- Develop an online portal for customers to access and manage their own personal data.



## I know how to protect information appropriately

We need to maintain a proactive, planned, proportionate approach to risk and security. Our response to managing risk should be appropriate and balanced with business need, enabling staff to do their jobs whilst safeguarding information. We need to emphasise that protecting information does not mean that we cannot share it and sharing information with our partners can often be the right thing to do.



## We will:

- Monitor compliance with security policies, ensuring that we adhere strictly to procedures for handling breaches, and that lessons learnt are incorporated into working practices;
- Support secure information sharing internally and with external partners and providers, whilst ensuring we adopt a proportionate approach to sharing between trusted domains;
- Explore secure ways of working with new technologies, such as social media and collaborative work spaces, ensuring that staff are informed about their responsibilities when using them, both in the office and at home, and are held to account.
- Continue to assess and revise those technical solutions which are already in place for protecting information, particularly where these mechanisms hinder the business process;
- Build information requirements into business continuity procedures, by identifying those assets which are business critical and protecting them accordingly;
- Continue to ensure that each information asset has an owner who has been adequately trained in good information management practices;
- Ensure alignment with government strategy on cyber security;
- Give staff the tools to protect information and manage it appropriately;
- Provide thorough training to ensure all staff understand the importance of protecting information appropriately

## **Current actions:**

- Review the Information Asset Register originally created in 2018.
- Map information assets against physical assets so that we can understand where our information is stored.
- Map data flows so that we can understand how our data traverses the various networks.
- Ensure that information is encrypted at rest and in transit where appropriate.
- Provide targeted data protection training to identified information asset owners as well as general training to the workforce at large.
- Identify critical information assets and ensure that these are adequately protected and can be recovered within an acceptable time frame to an acceptable point.
- Regularly review accounts and permissions to ensure that access to information assets remains appropriate
- Monitor cyber security intelligence agencies to be aware of current and emerging threats and respond appropriately
- Policy review
- Review of data transfer/sharing protocols and methods
- Behaviour Campaigns
- Regular IT Health Checks
- Maintain PSN assurance



## I have the knowledge and skills to manage information

We will ensure that all officers have the knowledge, skills and support they need to manage information and use it appropriately. We will build Information Management capability within the organisation and delivery partners through:

- a range of development opportunities;
- a culture that recognises IM skills;
- the development of information owners;
- continuing to strengthen the business intelligence and insight discipline within the council.



## **We will provide development opportunities to ensure that:**

- Information Management awareness is reflected in the council's induction process and refreshed regularly;
- Staff have the skills to use new technology, such as collaboration tools, to their maximum potential;
- Staff develop the IM skills appropriate for their roles through training and guidance which is relevant to their responsibilities;
- All staff have completed the mandatory e-learning training in respect of information security, records management, freedom of information and data protection
- Staff are clear on their responsibilities in relation to information management;
- Managers take a lead in cultivating good IM practice and knowledge sharing activity which staff can emulate;
- Directorate and service area champions are encouraged to promote good IM and knowledge-sharing practices.

## **We will generate a culture of good IM practices by:**

- Working to create an environment where IM and business intelligence skills are recognised and valued, and seen as core skills within the council;
- Working towards recognising IM skills and behaviours in the performance management process. Similarly poor IM skills or behaviours will be addressed and training needs identified.

## We will strengthen the business intelligence discipline within the council by:

- Ensuring that staff know whom to contact when they require advice and guidance on Information Management and ensure that help is readily available. This support will be provided by the Information Management Team in respect of governance and compliance, and the Business Intelligence Team in respect of extracting best value from the council's data assets;
- Build on the skills and knowledge of staff working in IM-related roles, providing opportunities for sharing knowledge and best practice
- Work with service areas to ensure that the importance of essential IM and Business Intelligence roles, including that of Information Asset Owners, is understood;
- Ensure that our network of Information Asset Owners has the tools needed to support them and have completed the necessary training;
- Raise awareness and facilitate the use of networked sources of support and guidance;
- Encourage staff and services to involve experts early when managing specific types of information, so that it is used appropriately and maximum benefit is derived from its use



## I know what is expected of me when creating information

We will ensure that officers fully consider the implications of creating new data sets, particularly when gathering personal information and are guided by best practice. Our officers will understand the implications of continuing to retain information long after it has ceased to be useful, or keeping information that cannot easily be identified and retrieved when we need it. We are mindful that storage is a valuable commodity and we must be efficient in the storage space we consume.



## We will instil an understanding that:

- Officers are not at liberty to create their own private sources of personal information that do not appear on the Information Asset Register;
- Officers need to take a wider view when collecting information and consider in particular who else may benefit from the data that we are proposing to capture and who may ask for it in the future;
- Personal information we process does not belong to us, it belongs to the individual data subjects and we must engender trust in those data subjects by demonstrating that we can manage it appropriately.



## **In addition, we will ensure that officers:**

- Understand what is classed as an information asset;
- Know where to store the various different types of information they use and which tools are best suited to manage that information;
- Are provided the information that allows them to track the quantity and cost of storage consumed at an individual, team and directorate level;
- Understand what to keep, how long to keep it for and *how to ensure that it can be identified, retrieved and erased later*;
- Can identify when information constitutes a formal council record;
- Understand the obligations with which they are required to comply under the various legislative frameworks including the Data Protection Act, the GDPR, the Freedom of Information Act and the Environmental Information Regulations as well as under statutory guidance such as highlighted in *Working Together to Safeguard Children*.

## I recognise the implications and risks of keeping information that we no longer use

We recognise that if we don't revise our data retention practices to reduce the overall data held, and by extension the data that is backed up, we face a huge sanction risk for noncompliance as well as the impacts associated with an eventual data breach.



## **We recognise that we have a problem in this area which we will address by:**

- Acknowledging that this is a challenge which cannot be addressed as part of business as usual activity and which will require the principles of breakthrough thinking to address
- Recognising that the problem has been 20 years in the making and will not be resolved overnight
- Ensuring that we apply suitable meta-data that fully describes each new record we create including the date by which it can be erased
- Moving all of the unstructured electronic data we hold into a new structured environment we will create using the tools which we have already deployed across the organisation
- Allowing flexibility for services to keep information where they find it easy to access rather than be forced to comply with the restrictions of a single, central corporate record management system
- Linking our currently disconnected retention policy to tools which will automatically apply the policy across our records
- Revising our approach to storing physical records to one which does not encourage uncontrolled record growth



## In addition, we will ensure that officers:

- Are given the training they need to ensure they understand the value of the controls we will put in place to prevent the growth of redundant information
- Always apply realistic retention dates to records
- Contribute to the analysis of legacy records and help identify those which we should no longer hold however we recognise that we require automated tools to assist us in the process of reducing the information we retain.



## I have the IT that I need to manage information

We will ensure that all staff have the technology they need to support the good practice and behaviours outlined in this strategy. We will achieve this by:

- utilising a common IT infrastructure and reducing down the amount of different software, systems and websites used in the council;
- ensuring that IM requirements are key to IT decision making;
- giving staff access to appropriate technology and providing appropriate information repositories that maximise data transparency and sharing whilst minimising cost.



## We will:

- Further develop the common ICT infrastructure to make it easier for staff to access, re-use and share information and collaborate within and outside the council;
- Provide an ICT platform that is secure and provides a sufficient level of protection to safeguard information assets;
- Further develop/replace software systems to facilitate easier remote working and better customer self-service;
- Continue to develop opportunities to share services.

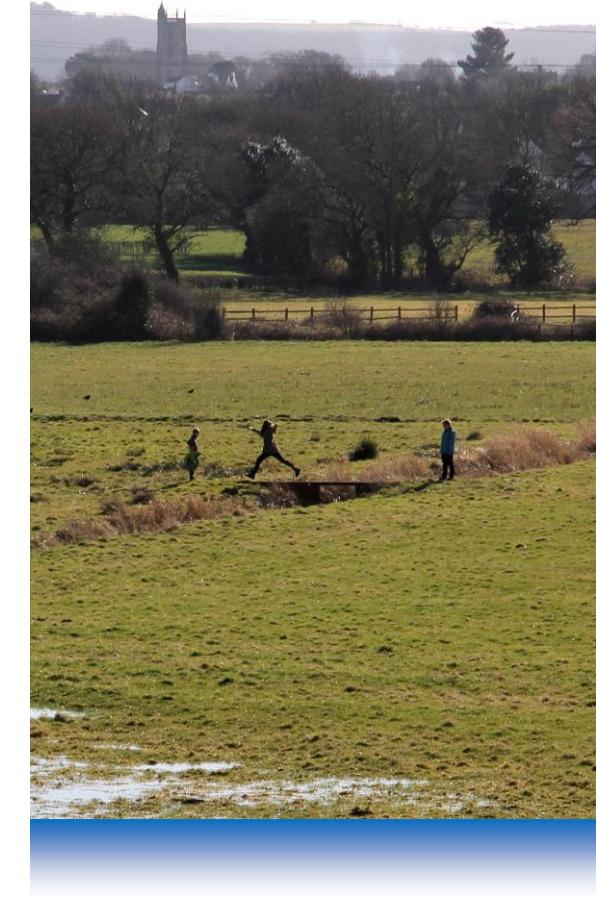


## The council's ICT will:

- Enable staff to manage, use and share information and knowledge;
- Support effective search, retrieval and re-use;
- Support the needs of business and adapt to changing requirements
- Enable us to embrace the opportunities presented by using new technologies, such as social media, securely for business purposes;
- Support flexible, remote and collaborative working;
- Incorporate information assurance and cyber security requirements enabling us to protect our information;
- Support compliance with the GDPR;
- Provide reliable management information to inform decision making.

## **The application our Records Management Policy and use of electronic data repositories will provide the following benefits:**

- Staff should know what information we have and where it is stored;
- Information can be shared where appropriate and re-used;
- It supports us in being transparent to the public;
- It reduces the risk of duplication - a single copy of a document is held centrally, rather than multiple copies held locally;
- The latest version of a document is easily identifiable
- Appropriate retention and disposal rules can be applied;
- Information is stored securely and protected via access controls;
- Information is not lost when a member of staff moves on;
- Using the prescribed corporate and service specific repositories reduces costs.



## I understand the value of the information we hold and know how to exploit it

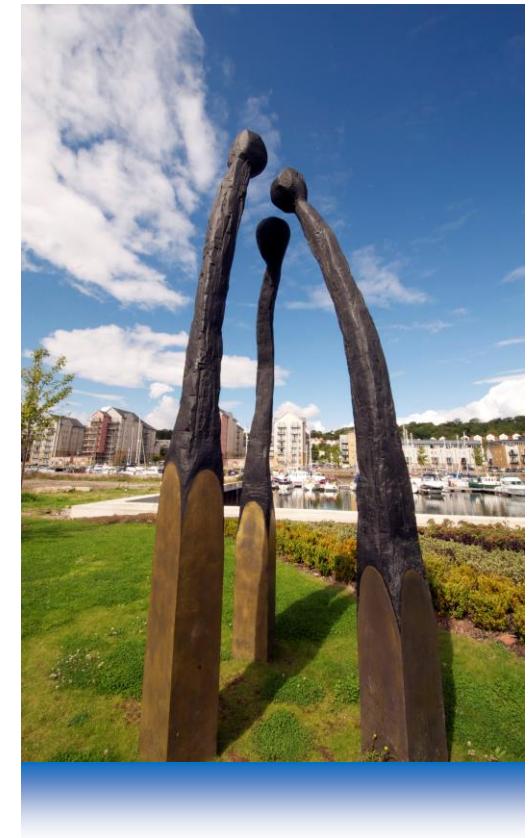
We view data as a valuable asset.

- We will ensure that we exercise good data governance that helps staff to use the right data in the right way, to generate business insights correctly and take sound business decisions.
- We will look to integrate and automate systems and data flows to ensure accuracy, to provide holistic and intelligent reporting of data that provides the organisation and others with timely returns, information and insight.
- We will ensure that the council identifies and protects its knowledge and data assets.



## We will:

- Reinvest some of the money we currently spend on storage and maintaining legacy systems in the development of knowledge management using the latest generation of tools and technologies
- Ensure that our data is of a requisite quality
- Look to reduce down multiple versions of the same data
- Identify the root causes of data challenges and seek to address these.
- Embed a culture of ownership, control and accountability for our data sets.
- Maximise data sharing, analysis and reporting to increase business intelligence and insight



## **Delivering the strategy**

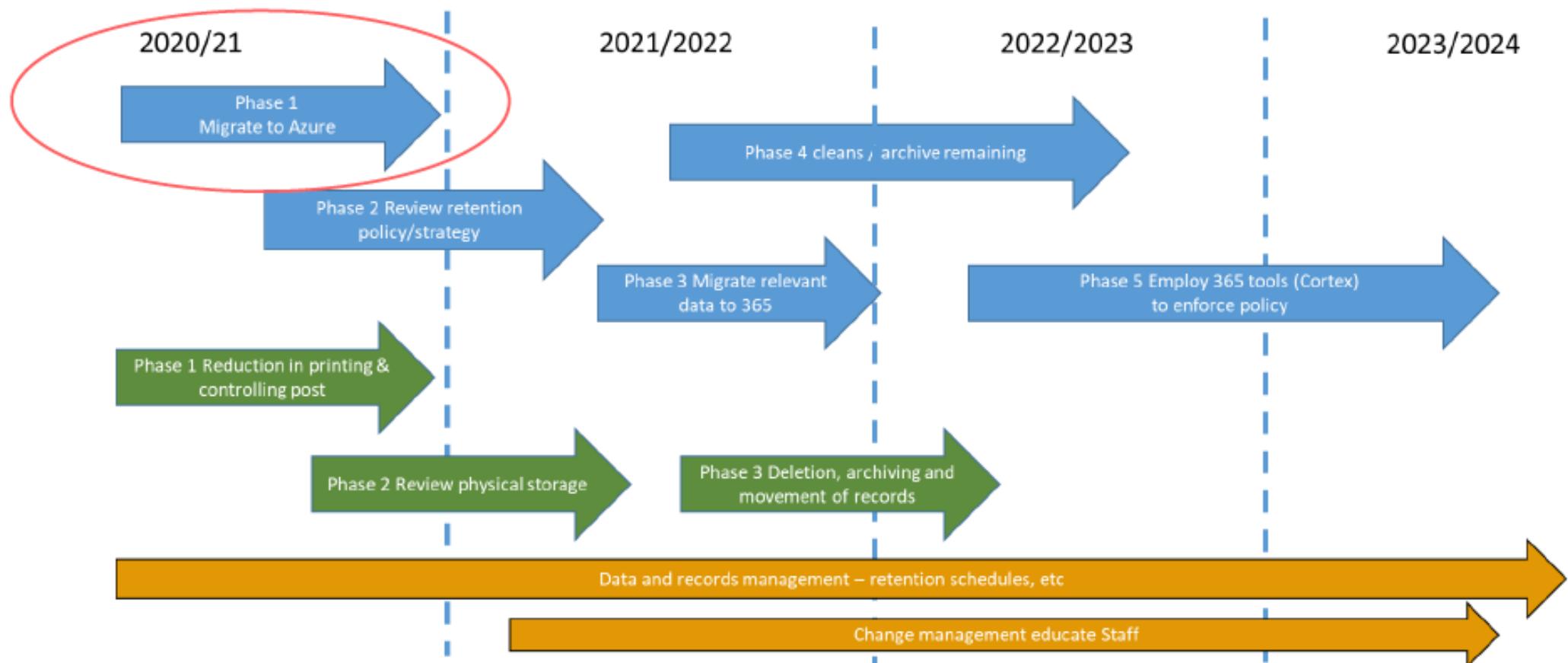
We recognise that the strategy represents a long-term ambition which will not be delivered quickly, however there some key steps are already underway, including

- planning for the new information management platform in the Microsoft Azure environment;
- a review of the hard copy records held in the council's long-term archive, and
- deploying a new information management and security training platform

Whilst investment will be necessary to bring about the change, we will look to reinvest the savings that we can realise from reducing the amount of information we store and by using the more cost-effective approach of the public cloud.

## The next three years

Digital  
Physical  
Control



## **The next twelve months**

We recognise that we need to rely more on automated tools and processes to help us manage our information, particularly in identifying and removing our legacy records. To this end we will:

- Create a new environment in which we can manage our information
- Construct the basis of a knowledge management platform which draws on the information we keep in the new environment
- Develop skills within the workforce to ensure the integrity of the principles outlined in this strategy.