



Digital Accessibility Strategy

2022 | 2024

Find out more online:
www.worcestershire.gov.uk

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Introduction

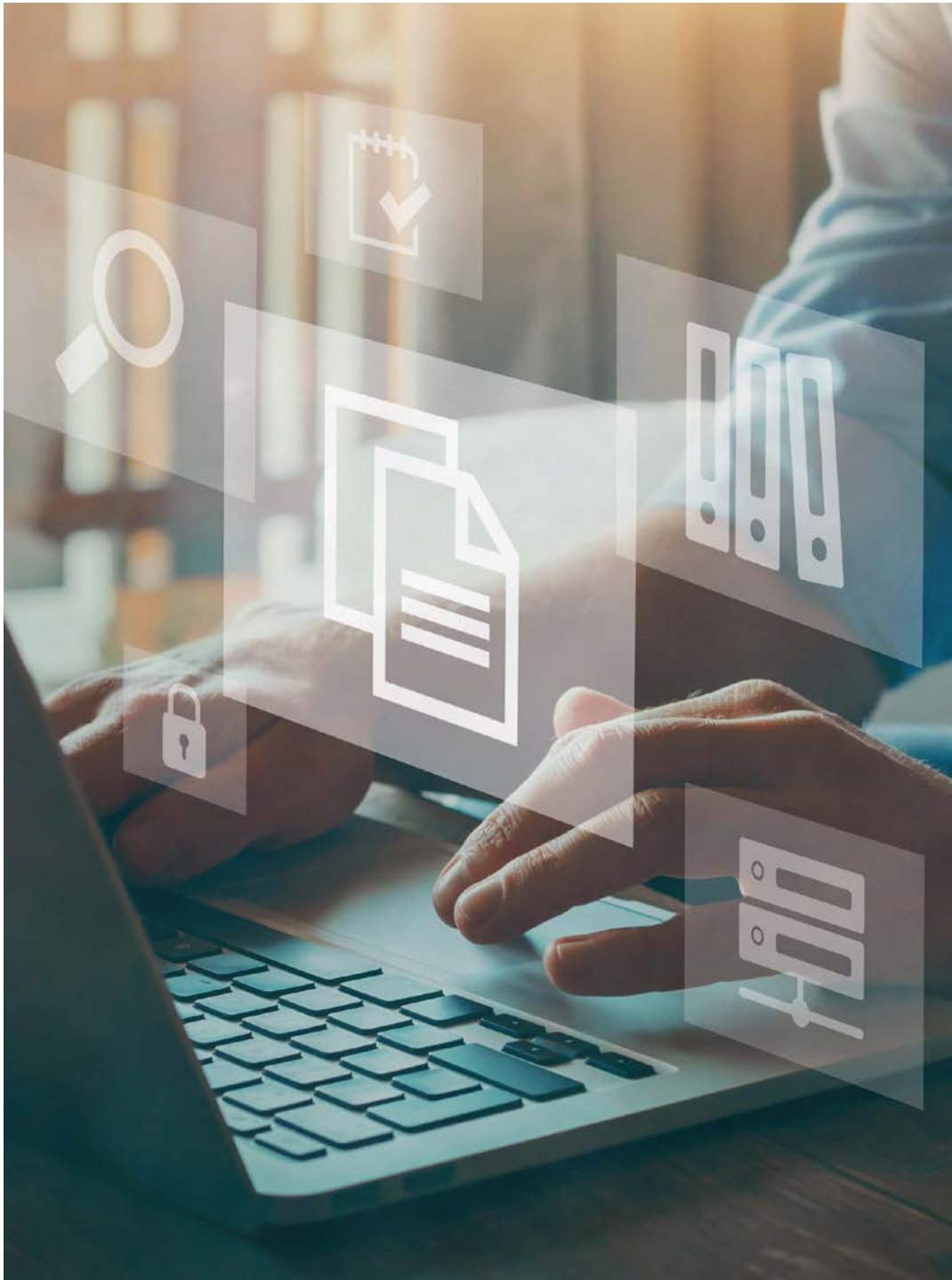
The world has changed, and we have seen huge technological developments and a considerable shift towards the use of digital technologies, digital information, and online transactional services. As technology has become an integral part of our everyday lives, it is essential that as a local authority we make our digital information and services accessible to the largest possible audience so that everyone who uses our websites and web-based systems are able to find, read and understand our content.

The social model of disability is a way of viewing the world, developed by disabled people. The model says that people are disabled by barriers in society, not by their impairment or difference. The social model helps us recognise barriers that make life harder for disabled people. Removing these barriers creates equality and offers disabled people more independence, choice and control. The Digital accessibility strategy refers to the inclusive practice of removing barriers that prevent interaction with, or access to websites, digital tools and technologies, by disabled people .

Making a website or web-based system accessible means making sure it can be used by as many people as possible, including those with impairments to their vision, hearing, mobility, thinking and understanding. Ensuring digital accessibility allows us to include rather than exclude disabled people , affording them an equal opportunity and experience as those without disabilities.

Digital accessibility applies to all digital services, not just to our websites, and customers who interact with us should be confident that digital inclusion has been considered and applied to the services we provide.





Purpose

The Digital Accessibility Strategy for 2022-2024 sets out our ambition to achieve a culture of digital inclusion that will ensure our websites and web-based systems and services are accessible to all customers.

When we make our digital information and services accessible, tangible benefits are realised for everyone, not just disabled people:

- ◆ We broaden our service delivery, by removing barriers to access
- ◆ We address legal, regulatory, and compliance issues in line with our Public Sector Equality Duty
- ◆ We improve the customer experience, and customer satisfaction
- ◆ We allow for a more diverse, and inclusive workforce

This document has been developed in consultation with senior managers across the Council, under guidance from the Assistant Director for IT and Digital and informed by the Digital Strategy. This has determined what currently works well, where there are problems, and what is required for the future. The consultation identified strength in what we already do as a Council and an ambition to deliver inclusive services in ways that match customer expectation.

The Assistant Director for IT and Digital is responsible for the delivery and implementation of this strategy. Progress on the implementation of the strategy will be overseen by the Web Governance Board.

Linked strategies and programmes

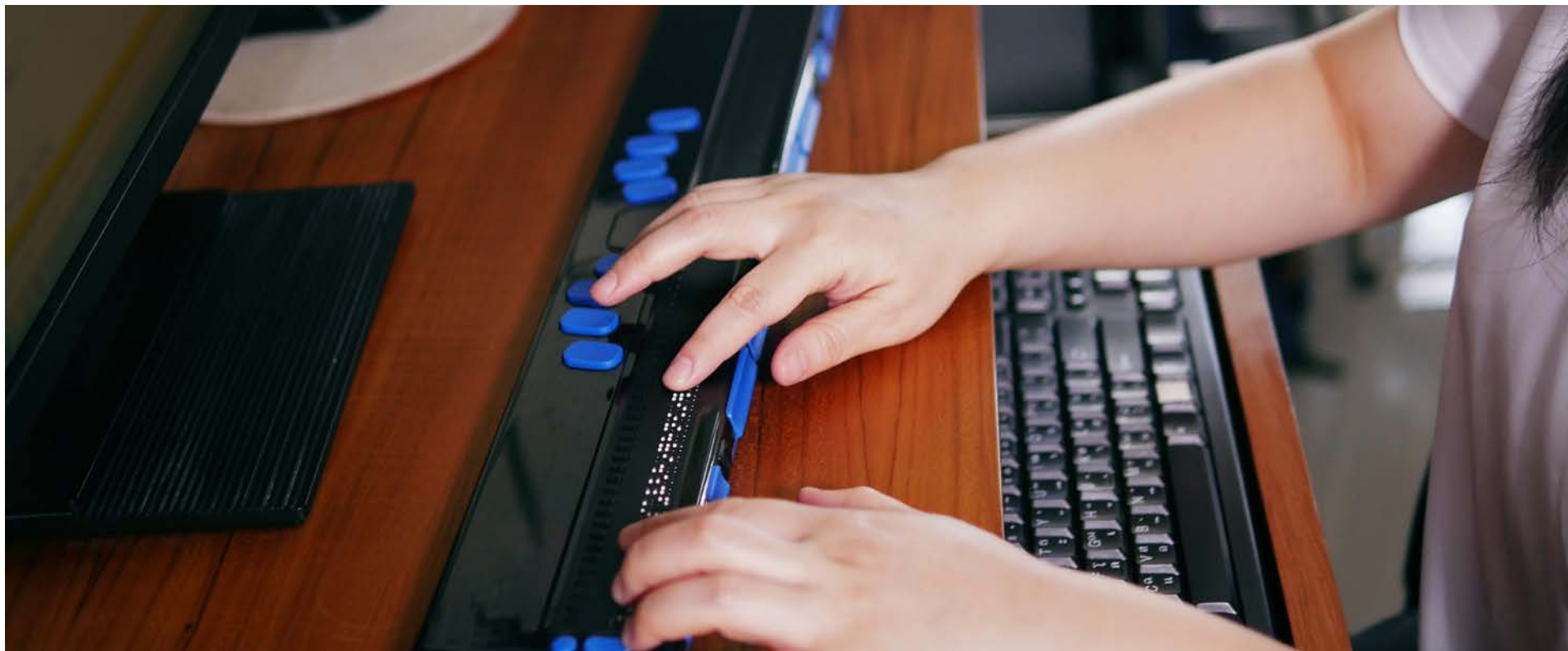
The Council has several programmes and programme boards that provide strategic leadership, governance and mechanisms to feedback and analyse information regarding digital accessibility and web content. This Strategy has been written to align with and complement our other organisational strategies to deliver a whole council approach.

Digital Strategy 2021 - 2023

Our Digital Strategy defines the council's digital ambition and is focused on outcomes and customer experience; providing a blueprint for how we will use technology and digital resources to achieve our business challenges and goals. It outlines the importance of encouraging equality, diversity and inclusion in the workplace by equipping staff with the digital values, skills and knowledge necessary to fulfil their potential.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy

An Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy is being developed, which will set out the approach to developing a diverse and inclusive workforce.



Other aligned strategies

- ◆ IT Strategy 2021-2023
- ◆ Information Governance Strategy 2021-2023
- ◆ Workforce Strategy
- ◆ Worcestershire Library Strategy
- ◆ WCF Workforce Strategy

The Council has several cross-cutting transformation programmes and boards that will provide strategic lead and governance:

- ◆ Digital Transformation Programme and Programme Board
- ◆ Web Governance Board
- ◆ Equality, Diversity and Inclusion champions

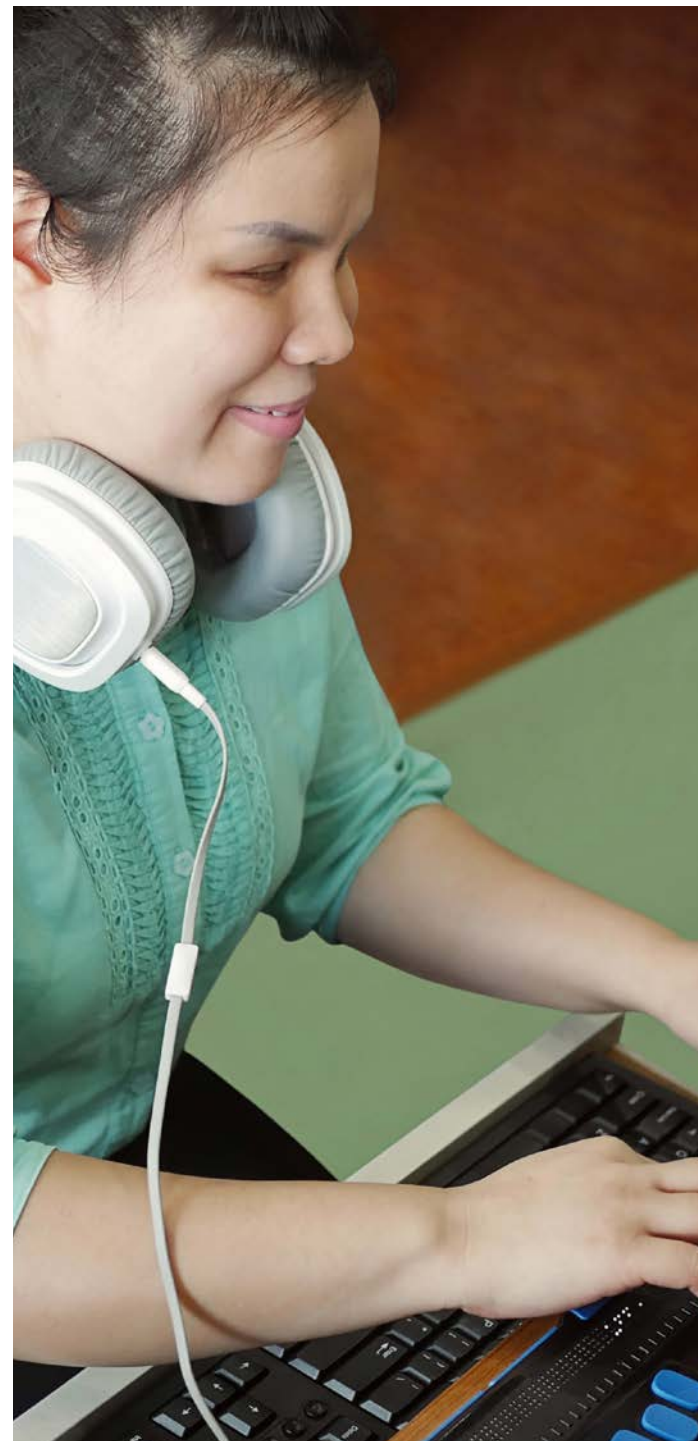
Legal & regulatory requirements

There is a legal framework and guidance under which we must manage our web content. The web accessibility regulations build on existing obligations to disabled people under the Equality Act 2010 (or the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 in Northern Ireland).

This includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- ◆ **[The Public Sector Bodies \(Websites and Mobile Applications\) \(No. 2\) Accessibility Regulations 2018](#)**
- ◆ **[Web Content Accessibility Guidelines \(WCAG\) 2.1 \(w3.org\)](#)**
- ◆ **[Accessibility regulations – Understanding accessibility requirements for public sector websites and apps \(campaign.gov.uk\)](#)**
- ◆ **[United Nations: Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#)**

The **[British Sign Language \(BSL\) Act](#)** recognises BSL as a language of England, Wales and Scotland in its own right. It is also supported by a duty on the Secretary of State for the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to regularly report on what each relevant government department has done to promote or facilitate the use of British Sign Language in its communications with the public.



Where are we now

The journey so far

We have a web development team who are digital accessibility specialists and provide support and advice on all aspects of digital accessibility. This team provide a centralised resource for the creation and amending of websites. We use Silktide, the web governance platform to help us improve accessibility, content quality, user experience, privacy, and SEO. We are currently scoring 98% compliance for www.worcestershire.gov.uk against the WCAG 2.1 accessibility standard for accessibility and we rank within the highest rated 30 UK Council websites for accessibility according to the Silktide index that has been developed in partnership with SOCITM.

Our Communications team create news and video content on the public website and intranet, they also create our social media outputs and assets. Several members of this team have significant skills in accessible practice. The team facilitate accessible video content with the inclusion of captions.

The Council has developed the SCULPT for Accessibility guidance to assist staff with shaping documents and content for

everyday accessible and inclusive practice. SCULPT came out of research conducted within Worcestershire County Council. It is our guide to educating our wider workforce with the basics of awareness and skills to become inclusive digital practitioners when creating documents and content. Our SCULPT for Accessibility e-learning module is now part of the mandatory learning expectation at Worcestershire County Council for all new and existing employees.

The Government Digital Service design principles, the Web accessibility regulations, and Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) are followed in the creation and delivery of customer facing digital content, transactional services and intranet sites. We also stipulate that third party systems and procurements should also meet these standards.

The council has established Equality, Diversity and Inclusion champions who are fundamental in ensuring that equality, diversity and inclusion activities are being delivered and gaps are identified.



Understanding our customers

The Council is here for vulnerable people in society who need us, and is committed to delivering the best outcomes for the diverse range of people living and working in Worcestershire, helping ensure our residents are healthier, live longer and have a better quality of life.

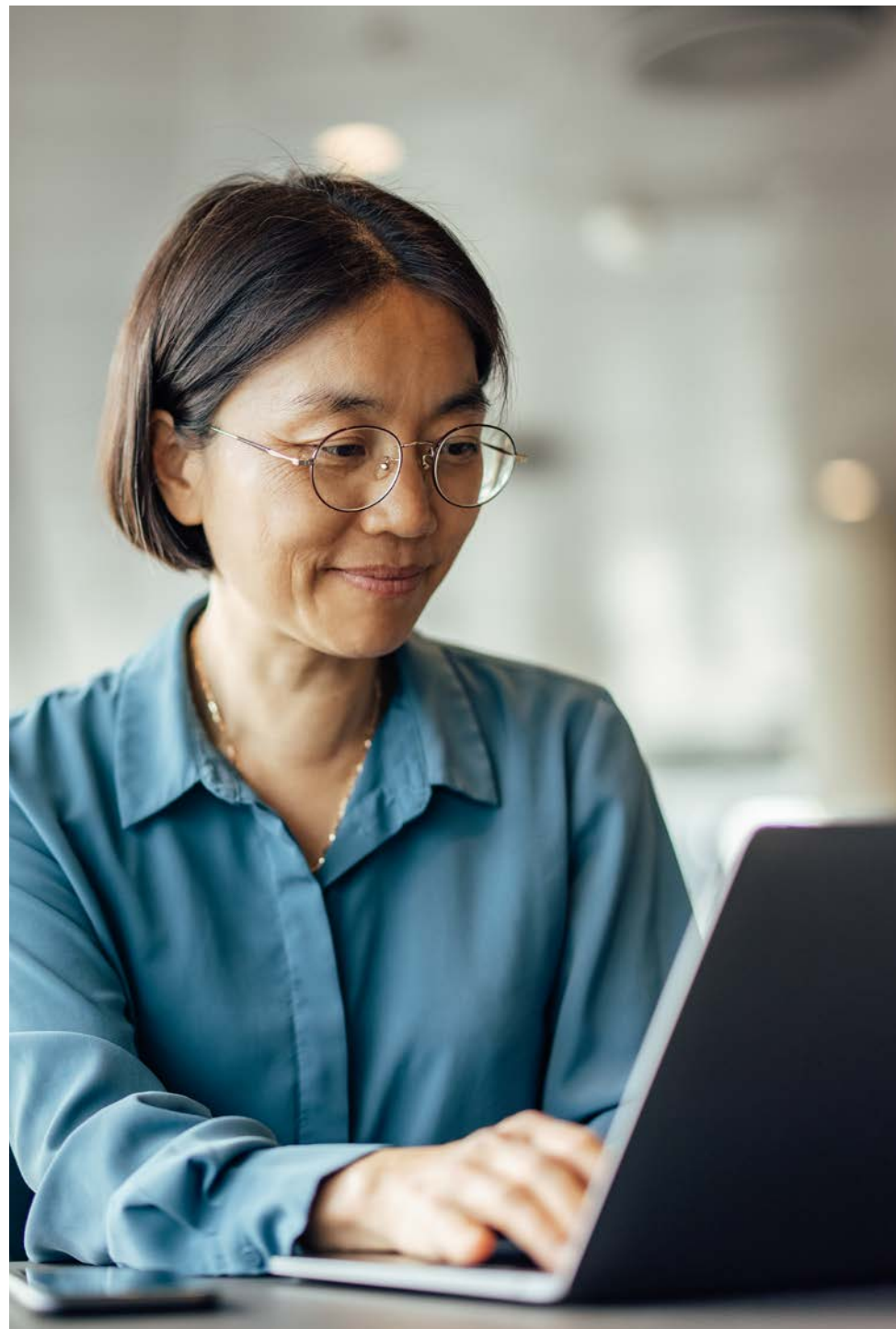
Two distinct groups of customers utilise our digital information and services. Internal content is typically consumed by Council staff, and external content is typically consumed by members of the public and/or business partners. Digital accessibility risks, standards, and guidelines are similar, but implications may vary depending on the audience. A member of the public may be denied critical information at an important time, whereas an employee may be unable to complete their job duties.

With such a broad and diverse audience, we need to ensure the services we commission and the content we provide meet the needs of all our customers, including those who rely on assistive technologies, thus improving their experience and interaction with us.

More than 600,000 individual users, both public visitors and internal consumers, engage with our content or download the documents we produce. We also use a range of social media platforms to reach out to our external audience.

We engage with teams and members of the community to ensure our services are designed from a customer perspective, with the aim that digital inclusion is embedded at every stage.

Recent feedback gained from a session held with Speakeasy identified issues with the amount of text used, the complexity of language used and the lack of images as visual aids. The feedback gained will be included in our new content style guide.



Governance

Digital accessibility and website monitoring fall under the overall control of the Assistant Director for IT and Digital and are regularly reported to the Web Governance Board, Digital Transformation Board, and Technology Leadership Team. Digital accessibility is discussed at Equality Champion meetings as well as at Directorate Equality Group levels, to embed understanding across the organisation

Completion of the mandatory Accessibility and SCULPT E-Learning is monitored and linked to the performance appraisal process for all members of staff. IT procurements conform to digital accessibility, privacy and data management standards. Larger digital projects and procurements are allocated a technical project manager and are reviewed by the Digital Transformation Board.

To monitor content for our public facing websites and staff intranet, individual pages are reviewed for accessibility as they are developed, and our family of websites and intranet are monitored by SilkTide to check the ongoing quality and accessibility standards.

Documents and PDFs on the website remain an accessibility issue for our customers and this is echoed by our SilkTide website monitoring system.

Digital accessibility maturity

To review the effectiveness of our current systems and processes for accessibility across the organisation, key stakeholders within the organisation were invited to undertake a full accessibility maturity assessment using the **Socitm and Haddell Inclusion Digital Accessibility Maturity Self-Assessment Tool**.

Key findings from the assessment showed that we had a clear understanding of the benefits that can be achieved by developing websites and systems that are accessible.

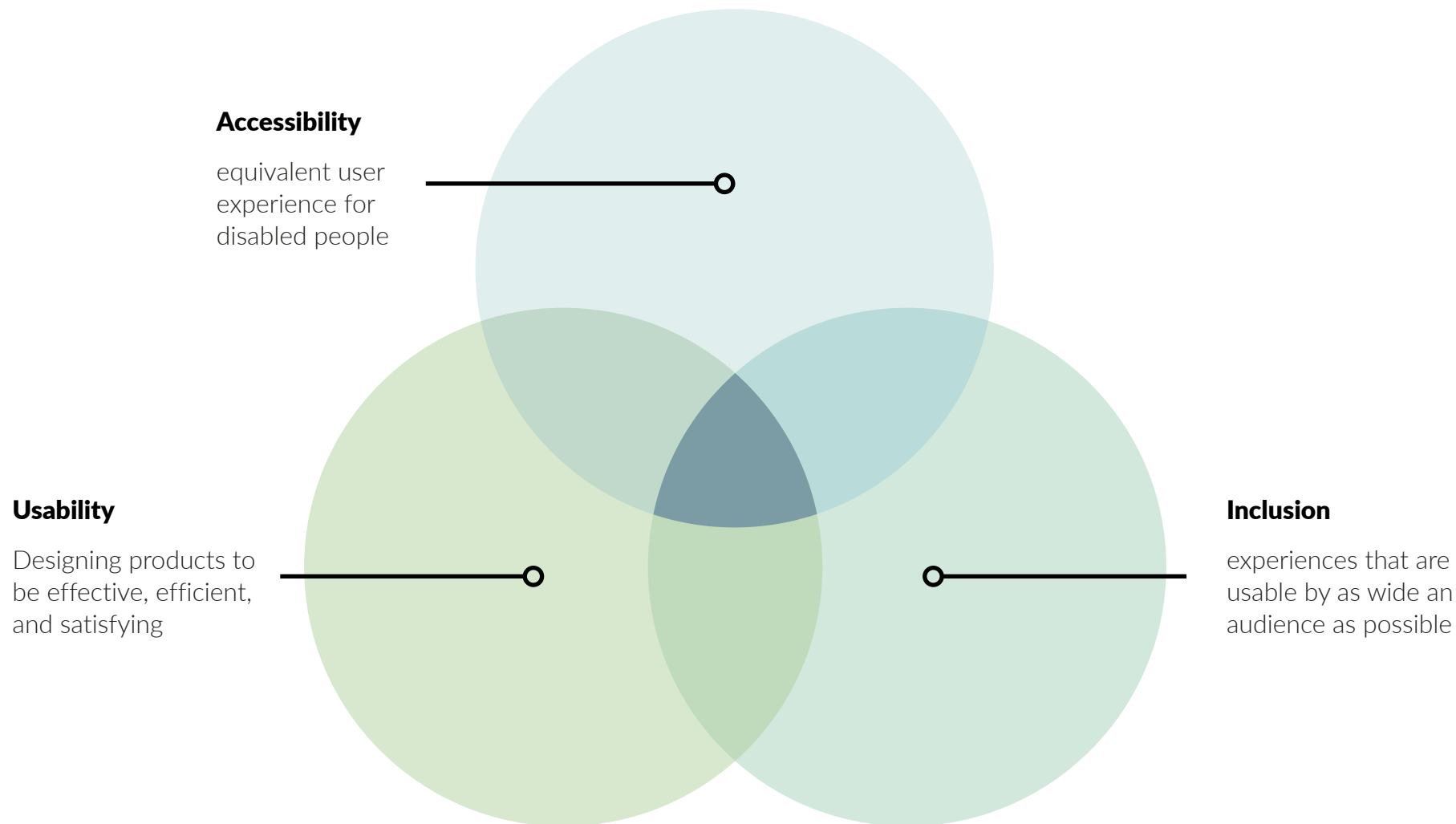
They also showed that we have digital accessibility embedded efficiently within our software development lifecycle and that we assess and manage the risk in the level of accessibility in digital products that we develop or procure before and after launching them.

The report highlighted that we do not have the expertise in all areas of the organisation. Although we have a central web team this team is small and there is a requirement for other staff in the organisation to have a certain level of skills and understanding. The main area that we need to focus on across the organisation is the creation of accessible policies and documents that need to be uploaded to the web site. This is being addressed through eLearning, SCULPT and support from the web team.

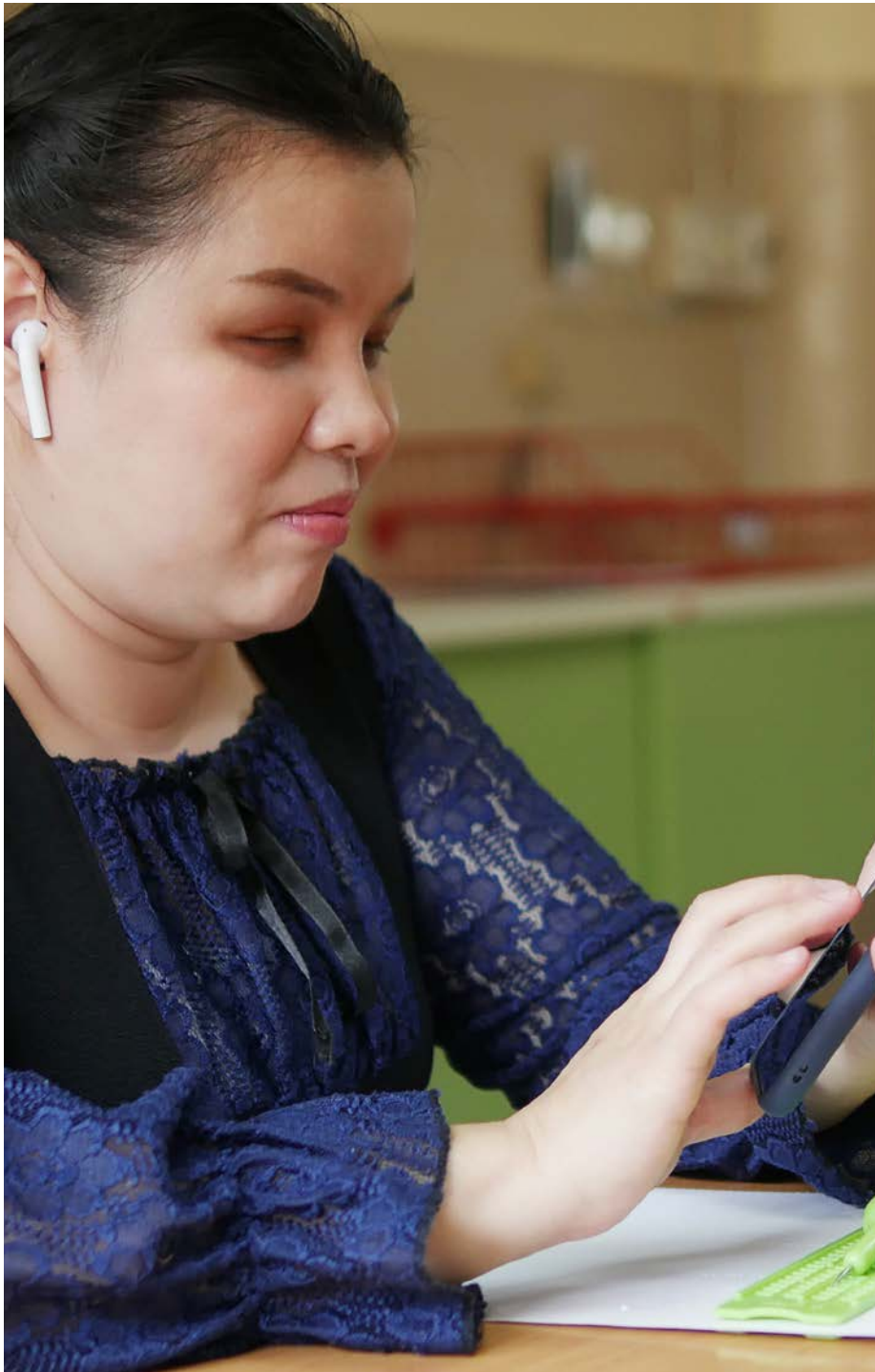


Accessibility, usability, and inclusion

Accessibility, usability, and inclusion are closely related aspects in creating a web site that works for everyone. Their goals, approaches, and guidelines overlap significantly. It is most effective to address them together when designing and developing websites and applications.



For all people to make full use of our website, accessibility, usability, and inclusive design must go hand in hand during the development and testing process.



Our Key Challenges

Although the creation of accessible documents is improving, inaccessible documents that were created prior to the introduction of the regulations can still be found on the intranet and the websites that need addressing. The SCULPT guide is the minimum expectation for producing documents across the organisation, to ensure the basics of accessibility and reasonable adjustments have been applied to documents prior to publication on websites.

There is more work to be done to reduce accessibility issues in documents on the website, but also to reduce the number of documents in favour of more accessible HTML content. There are also further opportunities to ensure accessibility is fully embedded across all platforms on the web and on social media.

Legacy systems introduced prior to the introduction of the accessibility regulations also need to be reviewed and where possible updated. Although we have a centralised web team who manage and maintain the majority of content and documents on all of our public-facing and internal websites, we also have some content editors who upload documents and news, some of these content editors lack the digital accessibility skills and require ongoing support.

Our Stakeholders

Anyone accessing our digital services, systems and web sites is a key stakeholder. By developing accessible digital services, systems and web sites we are ensuring that all our potential users, including disabled people, have a good user experience and can easily access our information and services. By implementing accessibility best practices, we are also improving the usability of the site for all users. Any internal service area providing information or services digitally are also key stakeholders. Digital is our cheapest channel, if our services are accessible to all digitally, we can potentially reduce the cost-of-service delivery.

Where do we want to be?

Our Vision

“to make digital information and services available to, accessible to, and usable by, the broadest audience possible, in a sustainable manner, through broad organisational buy-in and a culture of digital inclusion”.

Our Digital Accessibility Priorities

Priority 1 – Inclusive Culture

We will think about including disabled people, as well as those who are marginalised by intersectional protected characteristics, whenever we procure or develop a new digital system, service, or web site. Promoting best practice, developing, and sustaining a digital accessibility culture throughout the Council.

Priority 2 – Compliance

We have a statutory requirement to comply with ISO 30071-1 Code of practice for creating accessible ICT products and services, released on 28th May 2019, we also adhere to Web Content Accessibility Guidelines version 2.1. AA standard. We will adhere to accessibility legislation, standards, guidance, and best practice to ensure our customers can fully engage with us through all digital services, systems and website. As part of our Public Sector Equality Duty, we will ensure we consider the impact of any changes to services, for all defined protected characteristics, and be compliant with our General and Specific duties.

Priority 3 – Equality of access

Providing all customers and employees, including those with disabilities, equal access to information, digital systems and services.

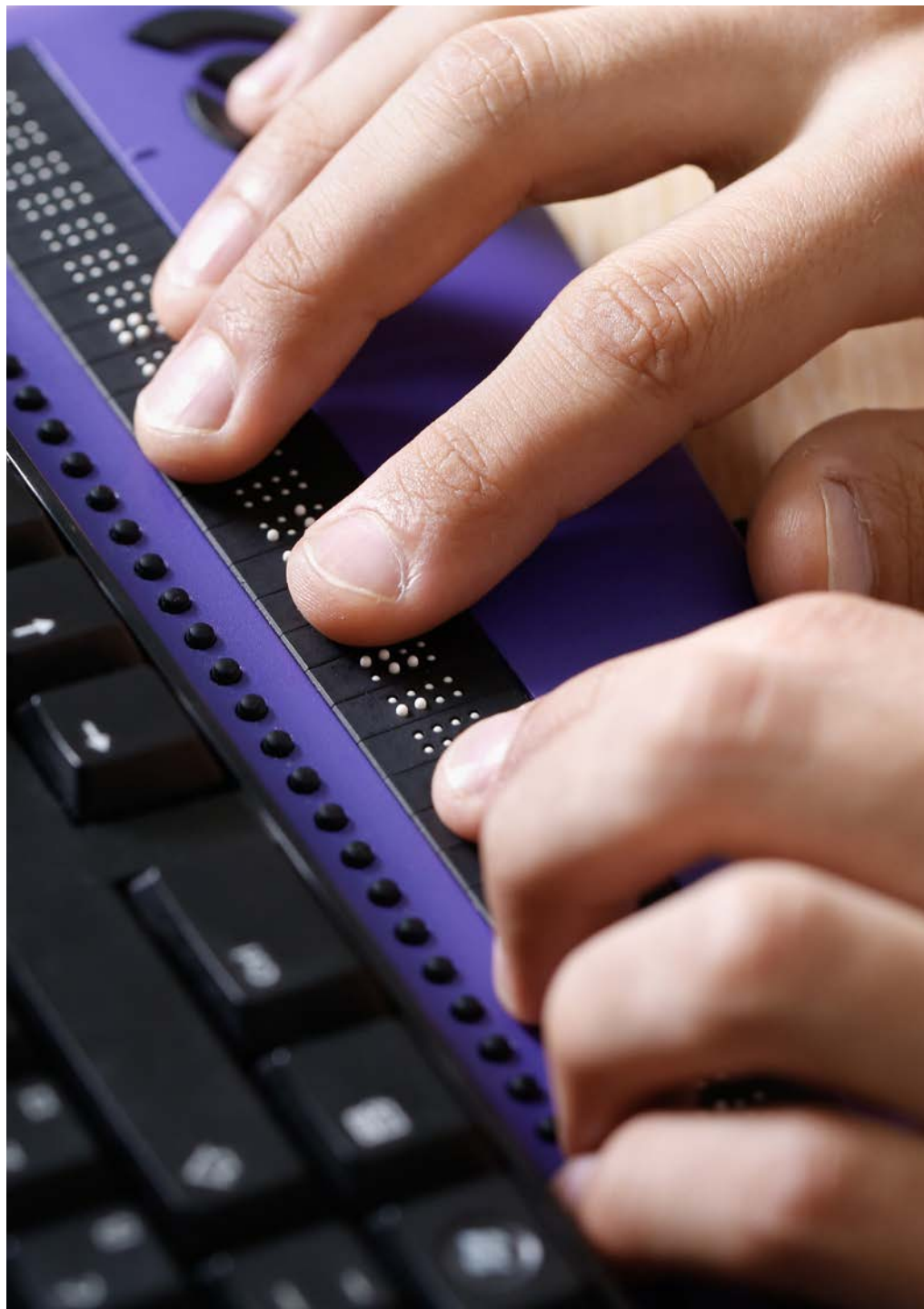
Priority 4 – Skills and Training

Ensuring those with digital accessibility roles have training and resources to complete their duties, with accessibility in mind. We will also ensure that staff who develop documents for websites also have the required training and access to resources to support them.

Delivering our priorities

Priority 1 – Inclusive Culture

- ◆ Use the Equality Champions as key advocates, to disseminate and encourage inclusive digital practice
- ◆ Work with local partners to share best practice methods and to support and develop a wider culture of a digitally inclusive Worcestershire
- ◆ Continue to promote digital accessibility
- ◆ Strategic senior leadership teams, managers and cross-cutting programme boards will continue to promote, encourage, and demonstrate good practice for digitally inclusive content
- ◆ Establish Digital and SCULPT for Accessibility champions to share good practice and encourage colleagues to develop skills in inclusive document creation





Priority 2 –Compliance

- ◆ Ensure the procurement process for all digital solutions clearly defines the accessibility standards to be met with a full review and approval process in place. Specification documents should include what the expectations are for the web accessibility regulations including WCAG AA.
- ◆ Define best practice and accessibility protocols for all online content including websites, social media platforms, videos, documents, applications (apps) and transactional services to ensure they meet our diverse customer needs, including those who use assistive technologies.
- ◆ Create a regular mechanism to be able to review and monitor content on social media or third-party platforms, so it fully adheres to the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) design principles.
- ◆ When working with third party suppliers of content, we will include what the expectations are for the web accessibility regulations including WCAG AA.
- ◆ Routinely report on and use our automated and manual checking processes to continuously review our accessibility performance.
- ◆ User-testers will be established, including users on screen reading technologies and those within our Worcestershire community to develop and regularly review content and digital services.
- ◆ Fully embed and embrace the Government Digital Service design principles, the Web accessibility regulations and Web Content Accessibility Guidelines in the creation and delivery of all our customer facing digital services.
- ◆ Wherever possible content will be created as html on a website rather than PDF or other document formats to ensure a more device responsive and inclusive customer experience.
- ◆ Review and enhance all information, advice, guidance, and digital systems in line with the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) and relevant design principles.
- ◆ Review and request that legacy systems and technologies are updated to create inclusive, intuitive, and fit for purpose content platforms.
- ◆ Develop a style guide as a reference source of all of the design decisions for our website. This includes its colour scheme, typography, spacing, icons, imagery, all the visual language and accessibility standards.



Priority 3 – Equality of access

- ◆ We will identify and build strong relationships with local customer groups and partners to help us shape, share and develop best practice.
- ◆ Simple feedback mechanism opportunities will be created, so that improvements can be quickly identified and any issues with our content can be quickly addressed to support continuous improvement to help us manage our services more effectively.
- ◆ Members of the community will be invited to demonstrate the needs of users to help us raise awareness and upskill the knowledge of our workforce.
- ◆ We aim that all content, including that beyond the website, such as emails, documents and presentations are also inclusive to adopt a wider approach and everyday culture towards digital inclusion.
- ◆ Promote the Speakeasy guidance to the wider workforce to promote accessibility, usability and inclusion.
- ◆ Development of alternative joined-up contact channels to ensure equality of access to services.



Priority 4 – Skills and Training

- ◆ Anyone who uploads directly to the web or creates online content will be fully aware of their responsibilities and have the skills necessary to fully comply with the Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) (No.2) Accessibility Regulations 2018.
- ◆ Continue to raise awareness and build more support resources to encourage learning and development of the skills for digital accessibility and to promote and facilitate awareness of content needs for all users.
- ◆ Continuously develop strong processes for our ongoing understanding of digital accessibility and any emerging practices, ensuring we comply with legislation.
- ◆ Ensure all of those who work in IT and Digital or those responsible for digital online content and media are fully skilled digital accessibility champions that can provide a strong foundation and an umbrella of support for the organisation.
- ◆ Ensure accessibility forms part of a digital competency framework to support best practice and skills in digital content creation.
- ◆ All new starters across the organisation will undertake the mandatory SCULPT training within three months of joining the organisation, and all staff will undertake refresher training every three years.
- ◆ A continuous rolling programme of communication and engagement sessions to promote and raise awareness of digital inclusion, skills, and principles to embed an inclusive digital culture will be developed.

Delivering change, monitoring progress and measuring success

Resourcing the delivery

Funding for the Digital Accessibility Strategy 2021-2023 will be incorporated within the existing IT and Digital budget and learning and development programme, where possible.

For specific projects associated with the strategy, detailed financial analysis will be undertaken as part of the development of the implementation plan, which will include identification of funding and resources as appropriate.

Monitoring and reporting progress

It is essential that we monitor progress and ensure that the work we are doing is delivering a noticeable difference to our staff, members, residents, visitors, communities and businesses of Worcestershire. Therefore, this strategy will be supported by a robust implementation plan which will evidence the delivery of our priorities and will set out key milestones and achievements.

Progress in implementing the strategy and delivery plan will be reported to the Digital Transformation Programme Board, bimonthly, and the Web Governance Board monthly, with the option to report to the Chief Officer Group and the Strategic Diversity Leadership Group via the Directorate Equality Group Chair, as required.

The Digital Transformation Programme Board includes representatives from across the organisation and provides the first layer of governance on the delivery of Digital Transformation projects including the prioritisation of project activity.



You can contact us in the following ways:

By telephone:

01905 846074

By post:

Worcestershire County Council
County Hall
Spetchley Road
Worcester
WR5 2NP

By email:

JHilditch@worcestershire.gov.uk

Online:

www.worcestershire.gov.uk

Find out more online:

www.worcestershire.gov.uk