

# Exeter City Council Data Strategy

## Introduction

This Data Strategy is for the whole council and not just data teams and specialists. It sets out how using data will enable us to achieve our wider strategic goals.

Data is an information asset, and like all organisations, we are collecting, creating and storing large amounts of data through our day-to-day operations. This data strategy sets out the technology, processes, roles and responsibilities that are needed to use our information to make informed decisions.

It is aligned to and supports the implementation of the Digital Customer Strategy previously agreed by the Council in 2023.

## National Context

In 2020 the Government published a national data strategy that sets objectives for how the use of data will help the country make use of five opportunities:

1. Boosting productivity and trade
2. Supporting new businesses and jobs
3. Increasing the speed, efficiency and scope of scientific research
4. Driving better delivery of policy and public services
5. Creating a fairer society for all

A key message, for the wider public sector from Government, is that the use of data is a key enabler for delivering citizen outcomes

In 2023 the then Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) published a policy to support local government to improve its performance by collating performance metric data to help identify opportunities for improvement and predict governance and financial failures at local authority level.

The Local Authority Data Explorer demonstrates the increasing need for external stakeholders to receive transparent performance reports based on accurate data collected.

## Local Context

The Local Government Data Maturity Assessment Tool has been developed to enable local authorities to build a shared understanding of how well they are using data.

<https://datamaturity.esd.org.uk/>

In 2023 we engaged independent consultancy Red Quadrant to undertake the assessment, all members of the extended leadership team and individuals known to have experience of working with data from across the organisation were asked to complete the survey to give a broad range of perspectives.

The outcome was an overall data maturity score of 2.88 (out of 5) indicating that while we have begun our journey of working with data, we have not yet implemented a systematic approach to developing data capacity and capabilities.

The main implication of this is that there is a need to take concerted actions and make considerable investment in data collection and handling before good practice becomes both widespread and reliable. This is also likely to take some time to achieve through a carefully planned project plan.

The production of this strategy is a key step in achieving higher levels of data maturity.

### **Strategic Objectives**

The purpose of a digital strategy is to enable the achievement of the strategic goals set out in the Customer digital strategy 2023-2026 and the draft Corporate Plan 2025-2028 in conjunction with the Strata Business Plan 2025/26.

Customer Digital Strategy: ambition: “We excel at customer and digital service”. To achieve this goal, we need a data strategy that helps us gather useful insights from customer data and builds the skills needed to create and run great digital experiences for our customers.

Corporate Plan: All local authorities are under pressure to reduce budgets and provide value for money. The data strategy must enable us to:

- understand the true cost of services by combining datasets from financial and operational sources
- move towards real time analysis to ensure deployment of resources is as efficient way as possible
- publish data to help businesses grow the local economy and enhance the authorities' cultural heritage
- facilitate the use of geographic data to manage local assets, influence local stakeholders and map local needs and resources
- standardise data flows across the council to produce an insight into customers' use and experience of services to enable continuous improvement
- consume external data to develop the evidence base for de-carbonisation of the local economy

### **Strategic Objectives – Risk Assessment**

If we were to take a ‘do nothing’ approach to data maturity. We would fail to meet customers’ expectations because:

- Customers will have a poor experience of our services through duplication of effort as they must use multiple digital systems
- We can't give customers updates on their service requests in real time
- We are unable to diagnose and address service quality issues
- We are unable to provide the transparency customers expect

Our services would fail to deliver their intended strategic objectives because we lack an understanding of the changing demands from customers and are unable to predict and prepare for future demand based on trends.

We would fail to achieve several of our net-zero carbon goals, city centre strategy and local plan objectives because we would be unable to publish persuasive evidence to influence partners and local strategic decisions

We would also be unable to make the efficiency savings needed to deliver a balanced budget and MTFP because we have data that is of poor quality and unusable for generating insight, and our leadership will become increasingly incapable of driving digital transformation and implementing data projects

Our asset portfolio performance would worsen over time leading to a loss of income and strategic benefit because we are unable to make evidence-based decisions, and our asset data becomes increasingly inaccurate as our data processes lag behind our strategic and operational requirements

## **Our Future Vision**

Our data is trusted and represents a single version of the truth that enables us to be informed, data-driven, and intelligent in our approach to service development, driving a collaborative approach to solving challenges, improving services, and enhancing customer experience.

All decisions we make are evidence-based using timely data. Our elected members make data-informed decisions and drive our data ambitions. We have clear goals for how our data can be used for wider public benefit and we monitor our progress against these goals.

We have a comprehensive range of data available to us and this is searchable, and we have broad awareness of where our data is stored. Data underpins our planning of all new work or service design changes, and we identify how all data projects support our wider strategic goals, and learn from previous projects when developing data products

Our data products are all designed for reuse. Data collection and storage processes are based on recognised data standards and documented. Data is made available quickly and reliably when requested and we have continuous data quality improvement.

Our staff have access to easy-to-use analytical tools and support, and they will routinely use suitable analytics and automation in service design and improvement, performance management and strategy development.

We will use our data for maximum public good, sharing data with partners for strategic planning, and publishing data using recognised standards.

Our staff will all be highly-data literate and we will invest in recruiting and retaining the specialist and non-specialist roles we need to achieve our objectives. Data skills will be developed through a comprehensive training and development programme.

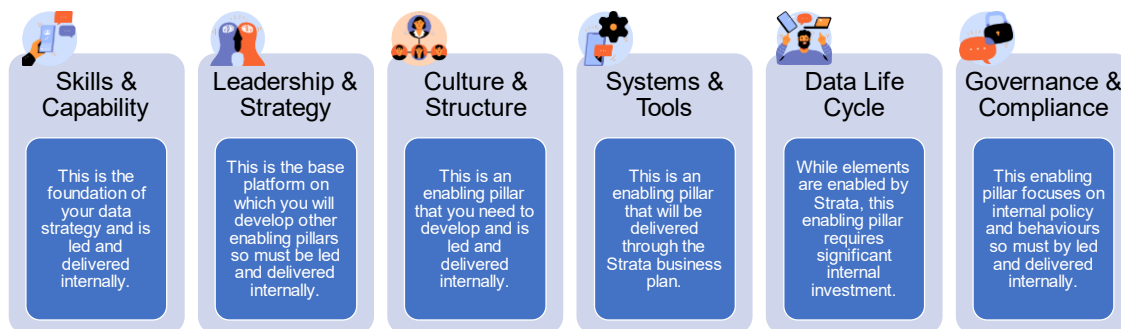
## **Principles we will work to**

- Our data is a valuable corporate asset as it enables us to achieve our strategic priorities.
- Regardless of how it has been collected or acquired, our data does not belong to a team, service or department and is used by all parts of the organisation for maximum benefit.
- Our data must be used for the public good of the people within the authority and wherever possible published on broadly adopted open data standards.
- All data must be collected and stored in structured datasets at or as soon as possible after the events they represent.
- Our data must be of sufficient quality, based on recognised standards, stored in standardised formats, complete and current.
- Our data must be defined using a corporate metadata framework, catalogued, discoverable and searchable.
- Our data must be ready for use at the point of access by being technically accessible, interoperable across our technology, linkable to other datasets and reusable.
- All staff, in both specialist and non-specialist roles, and councillors must have the requisite data awareness, knowledge and skills.
- We always consult and inform data product users and affected stakeholders when planning new data projects.
- Every dataset we hold must have an owner who understands their governance responsibilities.

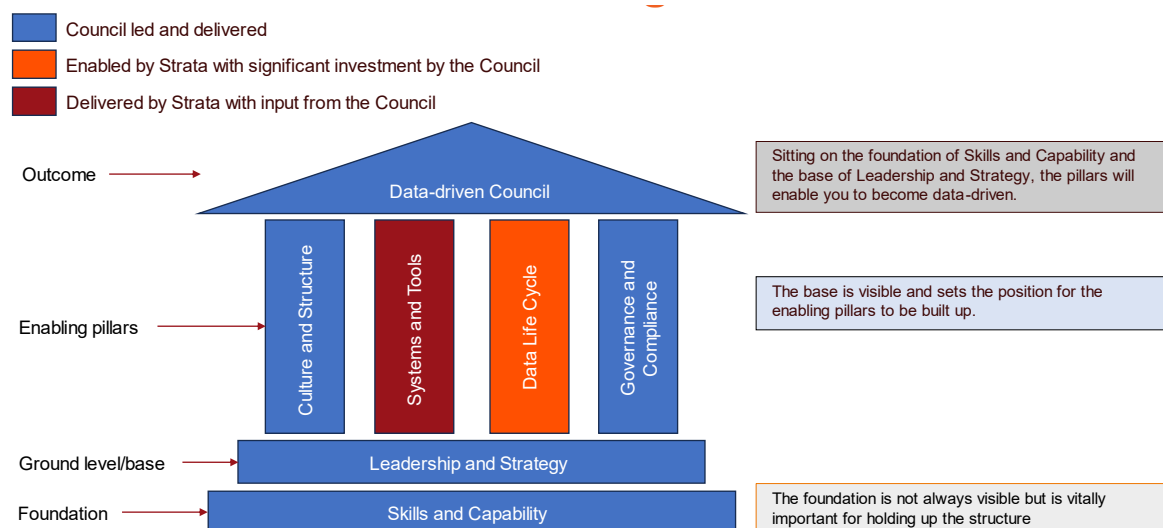
- Our use of data must be governed via standardised processes that are well understood and implemented consistently.
- Our use of data must always be lawful, ethical, fair and transparent.
- Our data structure and processes enable pro-active decisions and a coordinated approach across all service areas

## Key Components of the Strategy

Due to our partnership with Strata, it is important to understand which elements of our data strategy will be delivered by Strata (set out in their business plan,) and which will require us to lead or support actions. Using the LGA data maturity framework, it is also important to understand how the different elements in our data strategy interact with or depend on each other. These are set out below.



The following diagram sets out how these workstreams fit together to deliver the key outcome of becoming a data-driven council

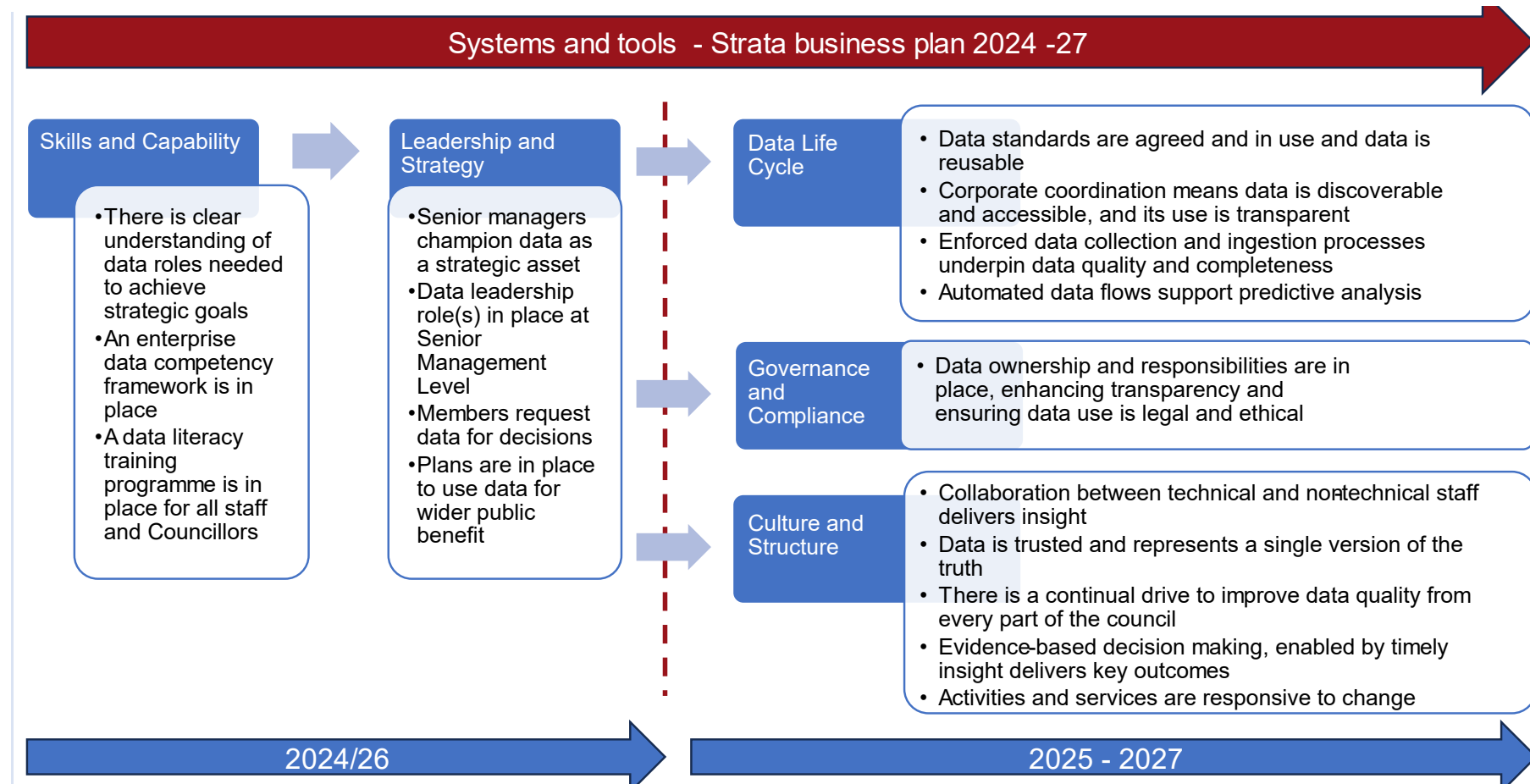


## Timeline and Sequencing: Actions and Next Steps

This diagram sets out the themes and actions in the strategy and how they are proposed to be sequenced.

Skills and capability, as the weakest element currently, is addressed first, followed by leadership and strategy in 2025/26. The other elements of the strategy are enabled by these and take shape over 2025-2028.

## Actions and Next Steps



## Appendix 1 : Data Life Cycle

Activities and behaviours towards data at the planning and design stage of projects.

