ICT Strategy 2026–2029

Active Cyber Resilience: Protecting the services our residents rely on from digital threats and disruption

Data Intelligence & Ethical AI: Transforming data into insight and deploying responsible, UK-hosted AI to automate the routine

Future-Ready Tech & Culture: Building a flexible technology estate and a culture of continuous learning ready for the next decade

Stevenage Borough Council & East Herts District Council

Secure Foundations, Intelligent Services, Empowered People.

Transitioning from a Legacy Utility to a Strategic Engine

The Vision

To power "Making Stevenage Even Better" and East Herts' "LEAF" priorities.

We are moving from reactive support to a proactive partnership, acting as the foundation for digital transformation.

The Challenge

A period of historic transformation defined by the "Confluence of Historic Change":

- **The AI Revolution:** Residents expect faster, personalized, 24/7 services.

- **Local Government Reorganization (LGR):** The biggest transformation since 1974, requiring consolidation of systems and data for potential unitary authorities.

The Solution (The 3 Pillars)

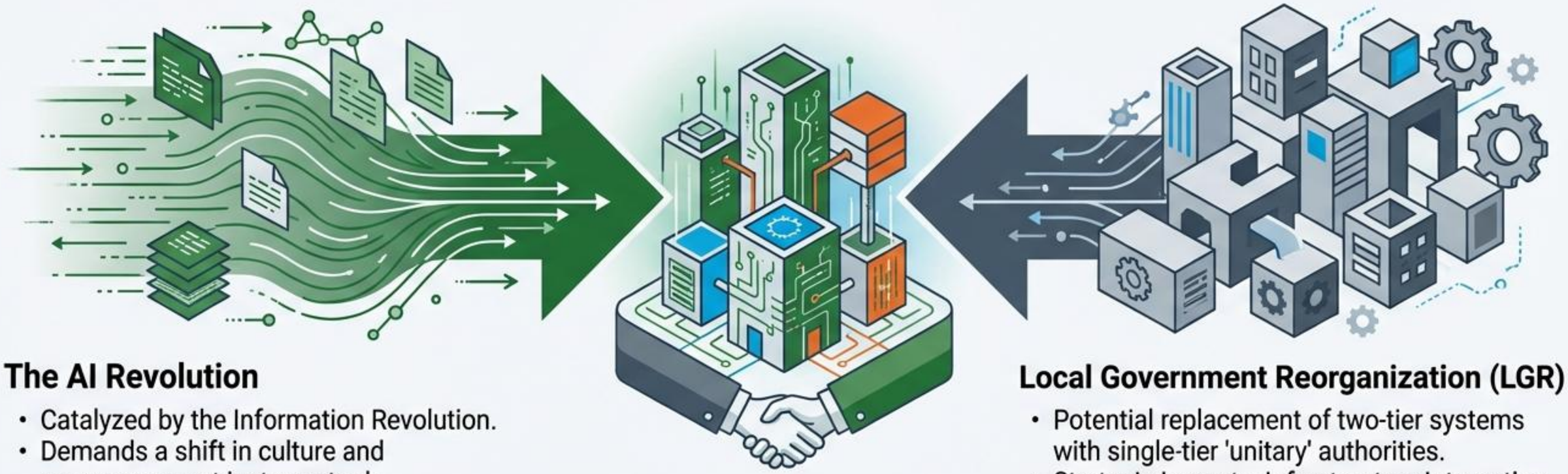
Active Cyber Resilience: Focus on Recovery Time and protecting services.

Data Intelligence & Ethical AI: UK-hosted AI to automate the routine; "Digital HR" governance.

Future-Ready Tech: A flexible, "LGR-proof" architecture and culture of continuous learning.

A Confluence of Historic Change

We face the convergence of massive technological acceleration and structural reform.
ICT is the heart of this transition.



The AI Revolution

- Catalyzed by the Information Revolution.
- Demands a shift in culture and governance, not just new tools.

ICT Shared Service

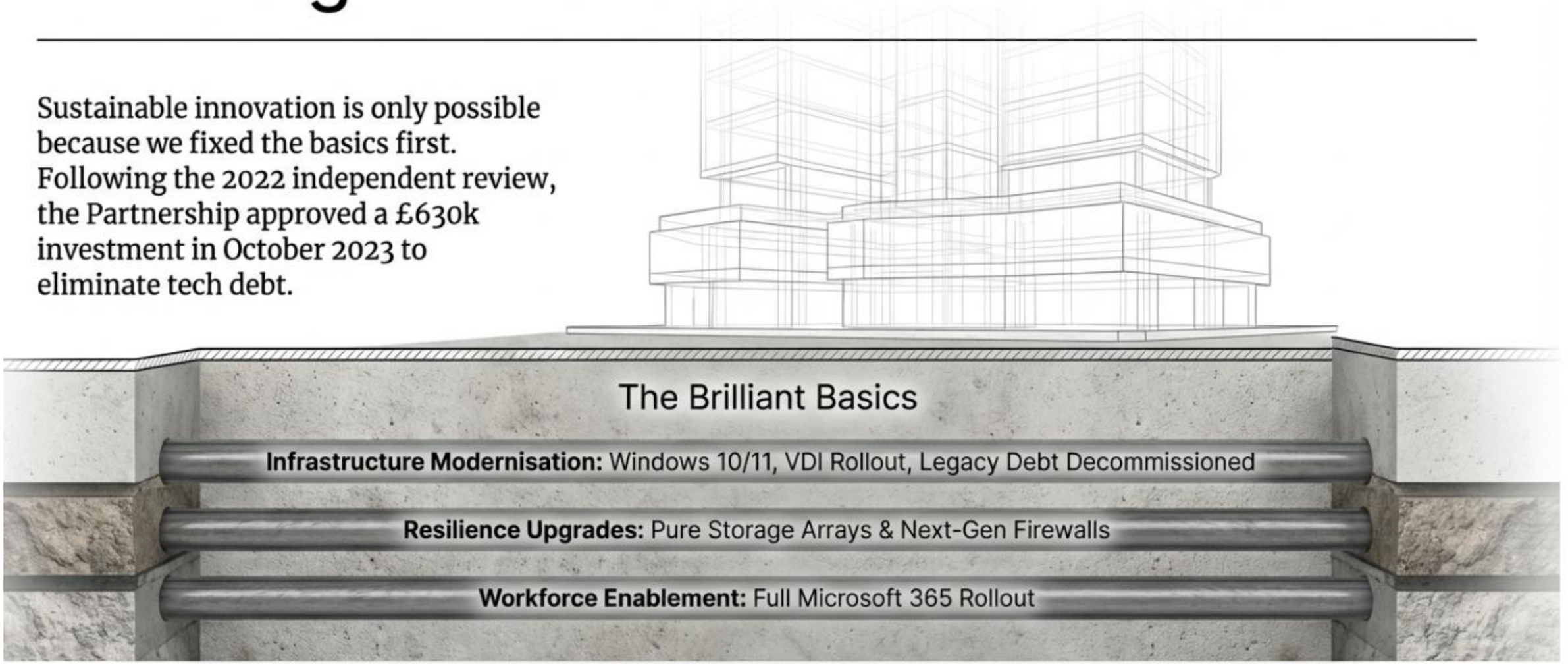
Local Government Reorganization (LGR)

- Potential replacement of two-tier systems with single-tier 'unitary' authorities.
- Strategic Impacts: Infrastructure Integration, Application Rationalization, Data Migration.

Key Insight: This strategy equips the Councils with the adaptability required to thrive amid this change.

Securing the Past to Build the Future

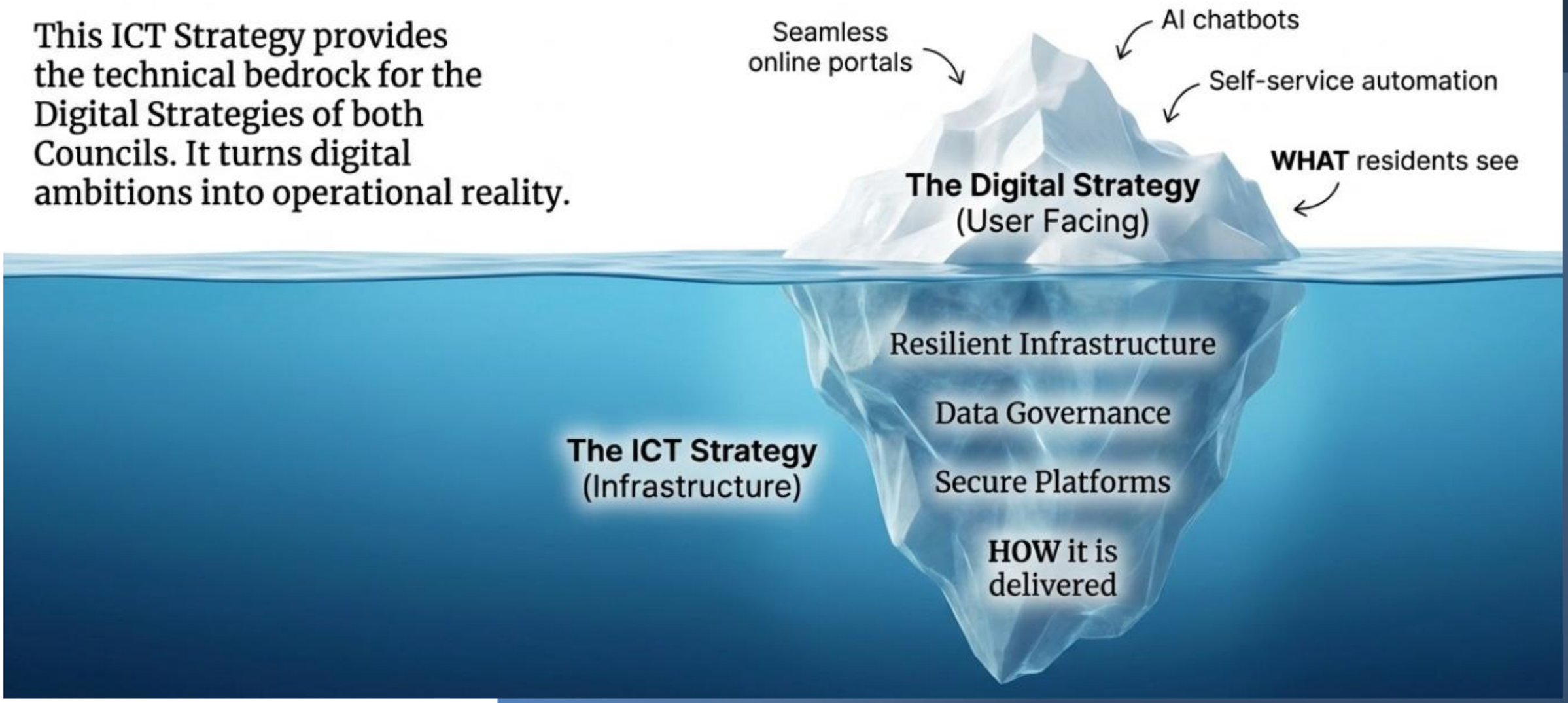
Sustainable innovation is only possible because we fixed the basics first. Following the 2022 independent review, the Partnership approved a £630k investment in October 2023 to eliminate tech debt.



We have moved away from obsolete technology and now maintain a proactive approach to updating all systems.

The Bedrock of Digital Transformation

This ICT Strategy provides the technical bedrock for the Digital Strategies of both Councils. It turns digital ambitions into operational reality.

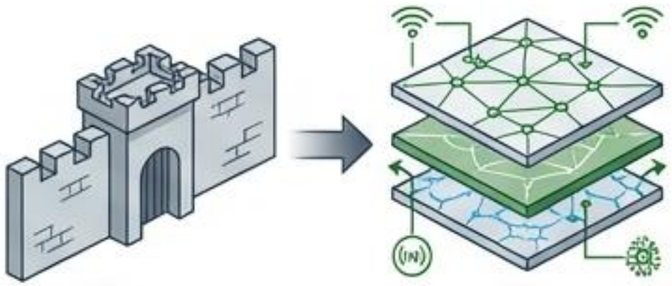


Strategic Overview – The Three Pillars (2026–2029)

Active Cyber Resilience

Goal:
Protecting resident services from digital threats.

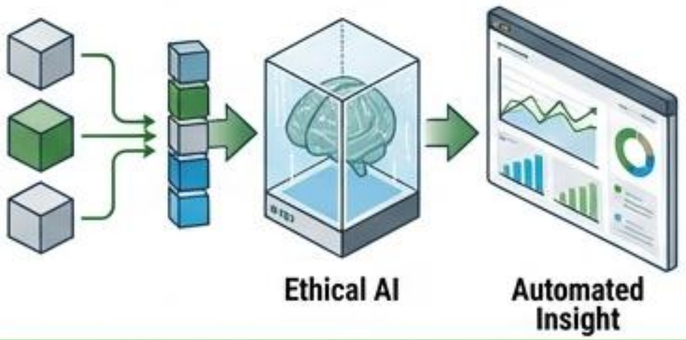
Key Shift:
From **Defence** to **Resilience**.



Data Intelligence & Ethical AI

Goal:
Transforming data into insight; deploying responsible AI.

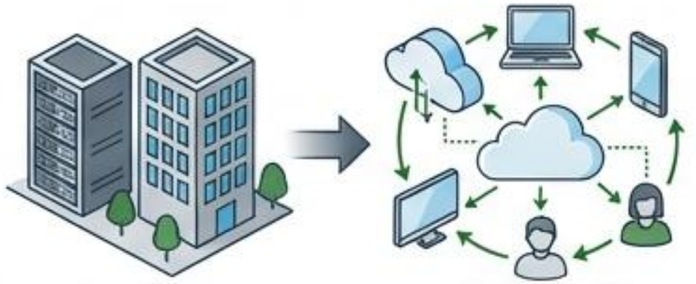
Key Shift:
From **Raw Data** to **Automated Insight**.



Future-Ready Tech & Culture

Goal:
Building a flexible estate and learning culture.

Key Shift:
From **Fixed Assets** to **Agile Adaptability**.



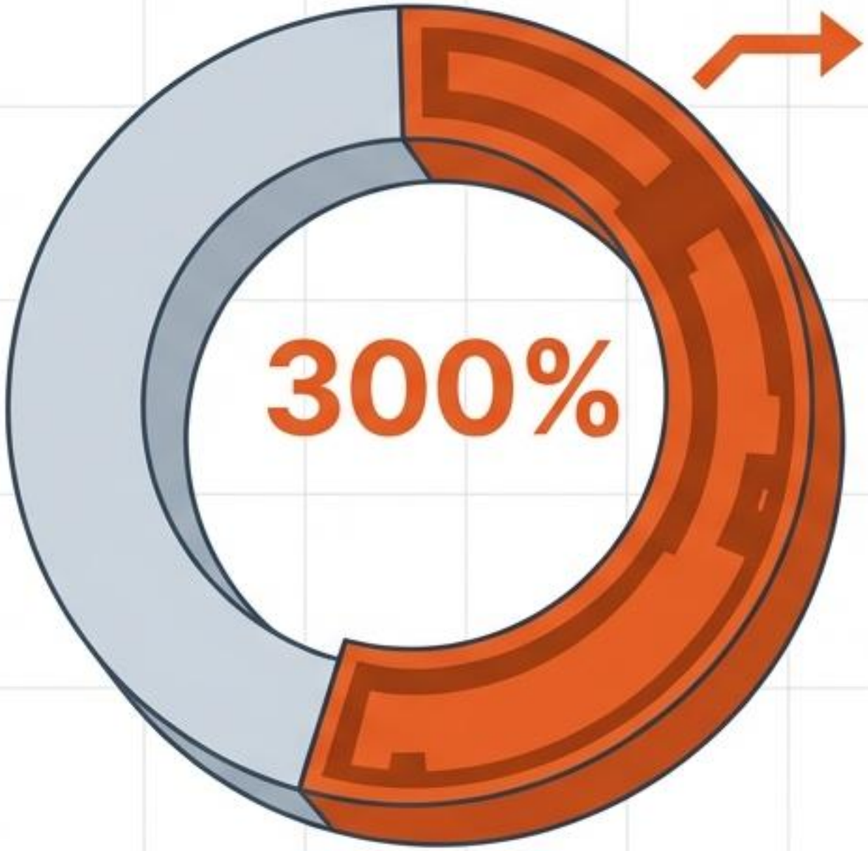
Active Cyber Resilience: Protecting the services our residents rely on from digital threats and disruption

Pillar 1 Context: The Cyber Threat Landscape

A ‘When,’ Not ‘If’ Scenario.

The Top Threats

- **Ransomware:** Data encryption demanding payment.
- **Phishing:** Social engineering attacks.
- **Supply Chain:** Vulnerabilities in third-party vendors.
- **DoS:** Denial-of-Service overloading systems.



300%
surge in attempted cyber attacks.

480,000
malicious attempts blocked in a single quarter.

5
state-sponsored attacks experienced by the Councils in the last 12 months.

The 8 Vectors of Attack

DoS: Overloading systems to make them inaccessible.

Supply Chain: Exploiting third-party vendors.

Ransomware: Encrypting data to demand payment.

Phishing: Social engineering via email to trick employees.

Unpatched Vulnerabilities: Access via unaddressed system flaws.

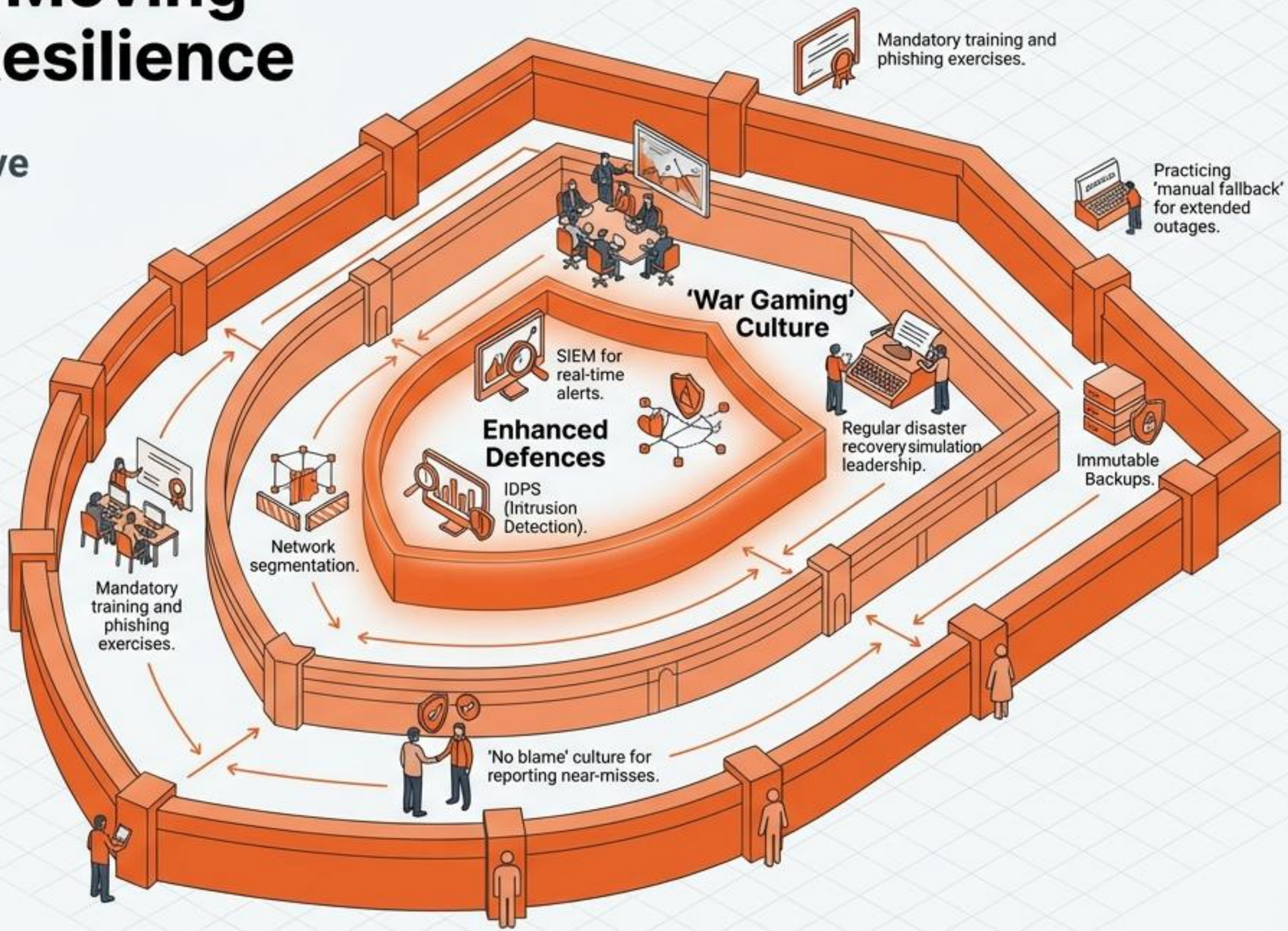
Emerging Threats: New vulnerabilities requiring ongoing vigilance.

Data Breaches: Accidental or intentional harm causing reputational damage.

Insider Threats: Risks from staff/authorised users.

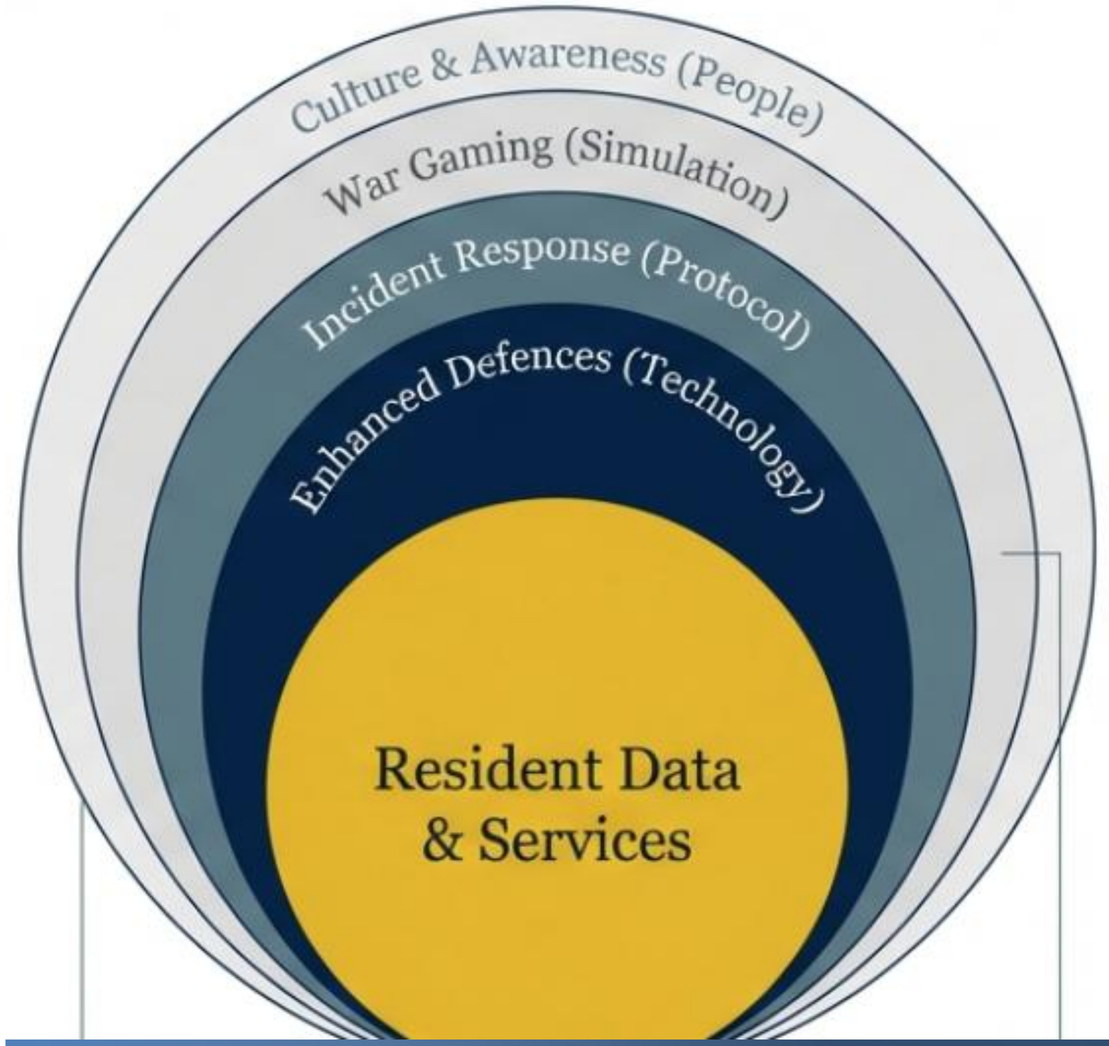
Pillar 1 Response: Moving from Defence to Resilience

Focus on **Recovery Time Objective (RTO)**—restoring critical services within agreed timeframes.



The Human Firewall

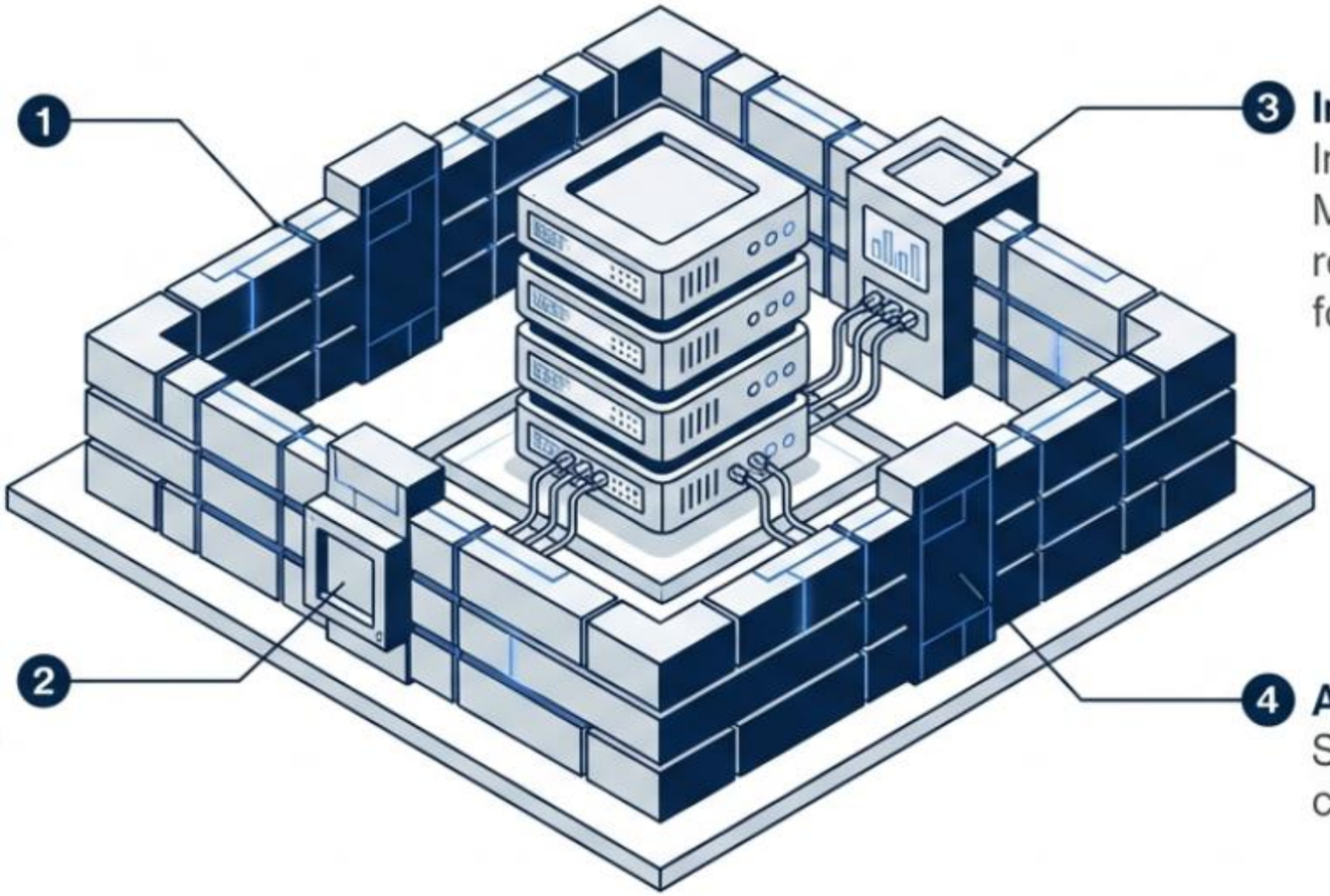
The Active Resilience Ecosystem



Initiative 1: Enhanced Cyber Defences

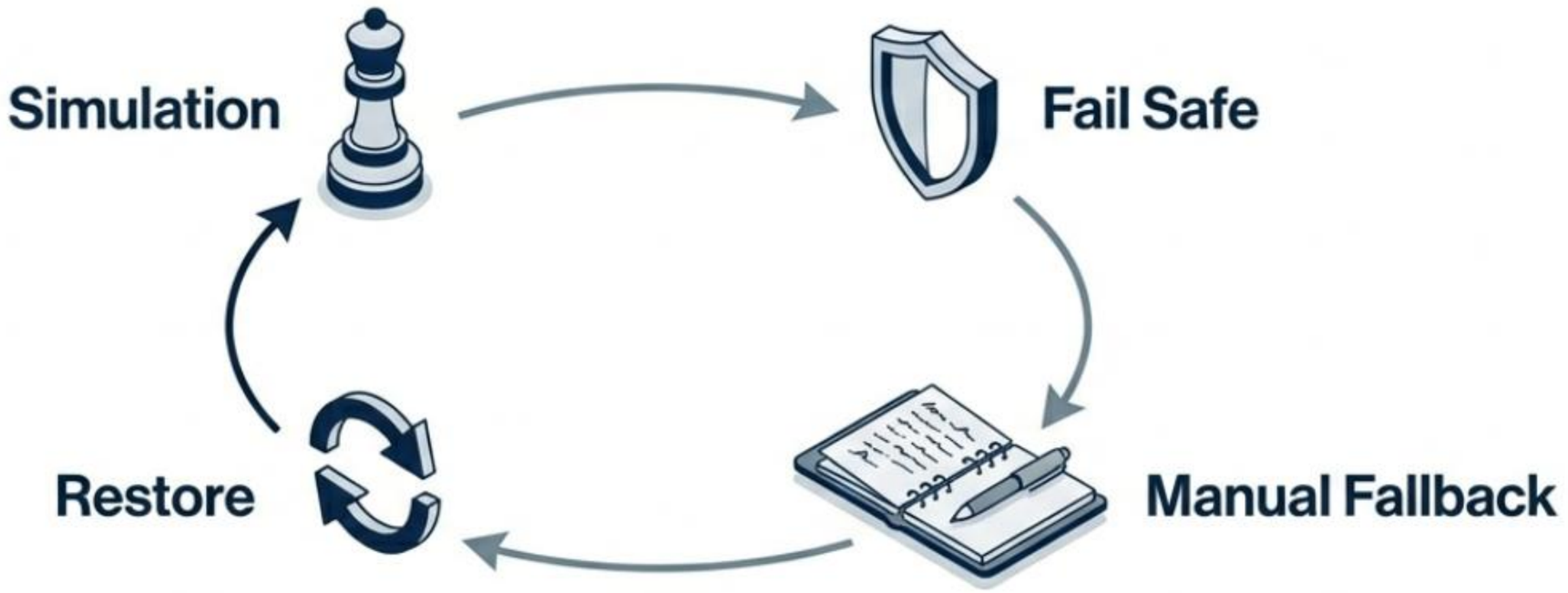
Optimisation and Modernisation of the Perimeter.

1. **The Perimeter:** Firewalls with deep packet inspection and real-time threat prevention.
2. **Monitoring:** Intrusion Detection and Prevention Systems (IDPS).
3. **Intelligence:** Security Information and Event Management (SIEM) for real-time alerts and forensics.
4. **Architecture:** Network Segmentation to isolate critical systems.



Initiative 2: War Gaming & Recovery Testing

Defence alone is not enough. We must validate our ability to recover.



We conduct regular exercises replicating high-impact threats like **Ransomware** and **System Failure**. Testing Immutable Backups for Housing, Revenues & Benefits. Staff rehearse switching to pen-and-paper operations to maintain continuity during outages.

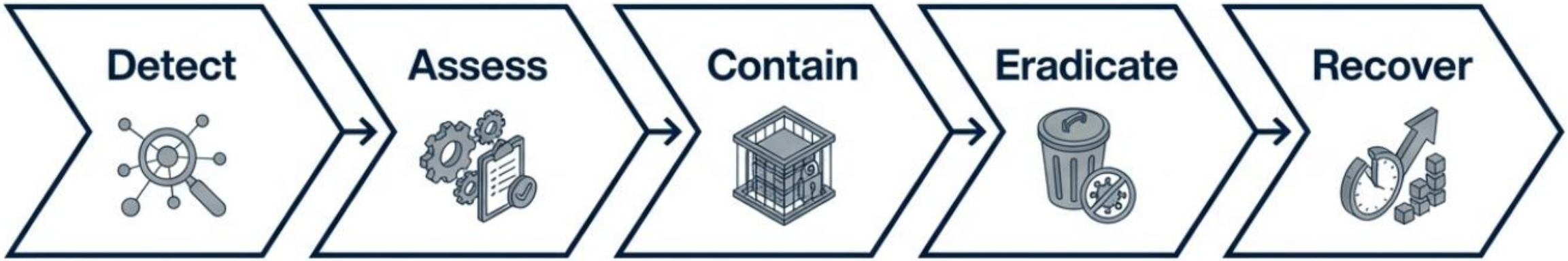
Initiative 3: Building the ‘Human Firewall’

Transforming staff from a risk factor into a primary line of defence.

- Mandatory Training: Password hygiene, remote work security, and social engineering.
- Active Testing: Simulated phishing exercises and real-world scenario drills.
- Cultural Shift: A “No-Blame” reporting culture. Staff are encouraged to report near misses without fear.

Initiative 4: Incident Response Protocols

A structured approach to manage and mitigate cyber incidents.



- **Governance:** Defined roles and responsibilities for swift action.
- **Legislative Alignment:** All activities aligned with the Cyber Security and Resilience Bill (2025).
- **Objective:** To restore essential operations with minimal disruption through a coordinated, pre-planned response.

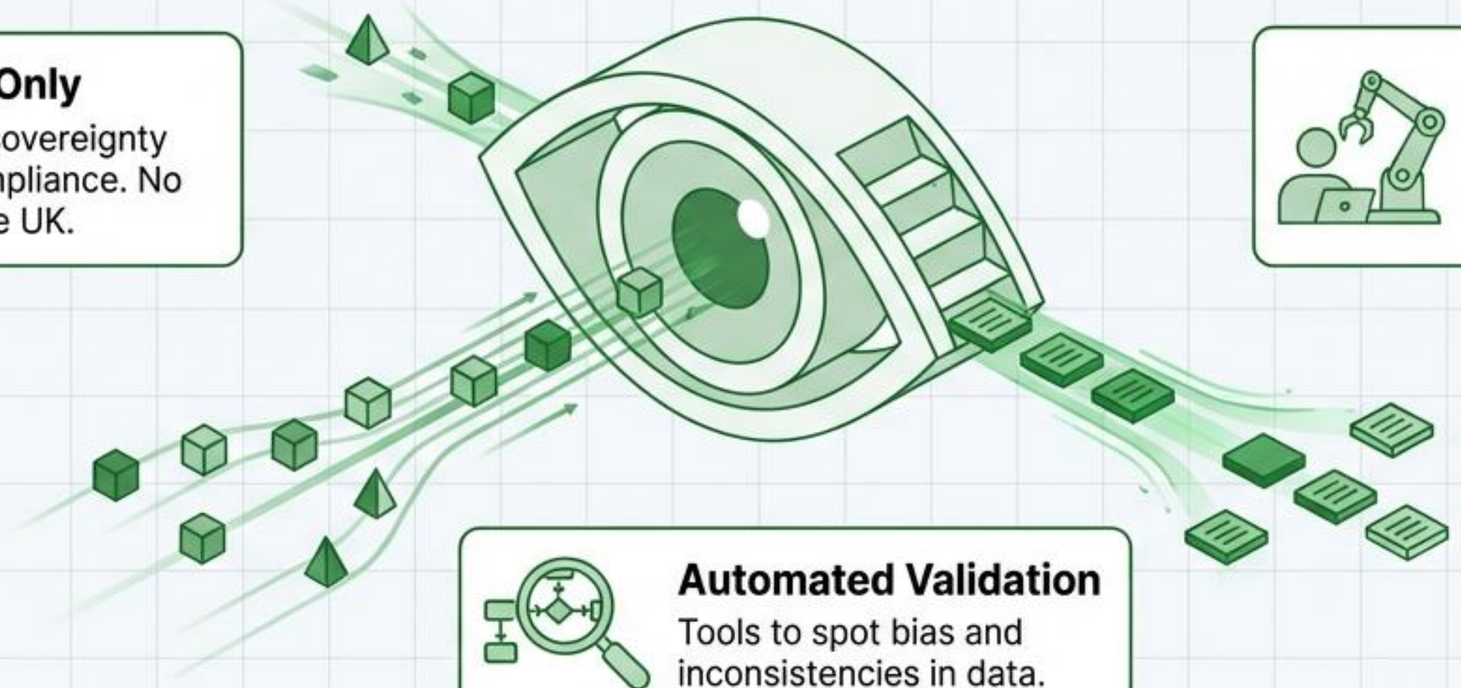
Pillar 2: Data Intelligence & Ethical AI: Transforming data into insight and deploying responsible, UK-hosted AI to automate the routine

Pillar 2: Data Intelligence & Ethical AI

Core Philosophy: **Ethical by Design**

UK-Hosted Only

Ensures data sovereignty and GDPR compliance. No data leaves the UK.



Human-in-the-Loop

AI proposes, Humans decide. Critical decisions always under staff supervision.

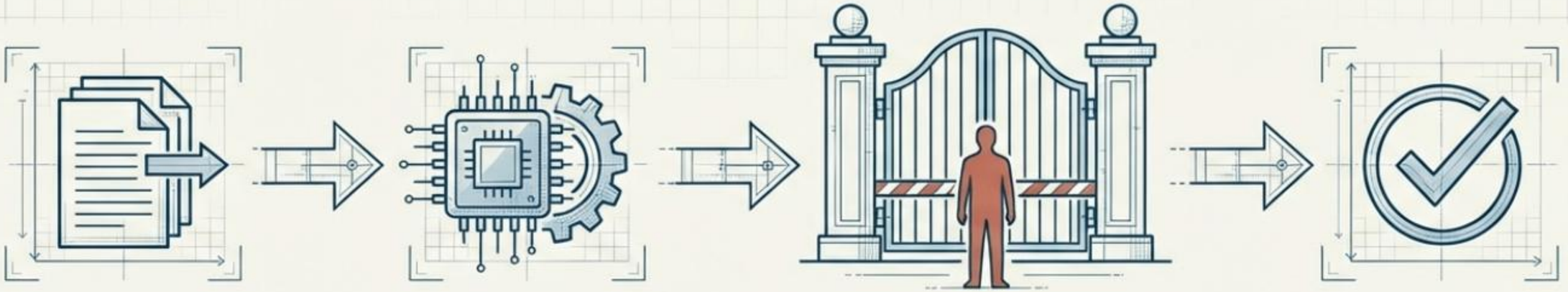
Automated Validation

Tools to spot bias and inconsistencies in data.

Key Use Cases

Automating routine administrative burdens (scheduling, document processing) to free up staff for high-value work.

We enhance, not replace, human oversight through Human-in-the-Loop governance.



Input Data

AI Processing

Analysis, Insight Generation, Proposed Actions.

The Human Gate

Review, Validation, contextual judgment.

Final Decision

Critical Impact Protocol: Any decision affecting a resident's access to services or wellbeing remains under strict staff supervision. Staff receive clear guidelines on when and how to intervene.

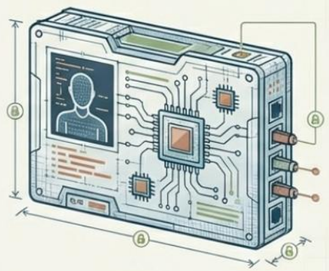
"Every decision will be reviewed by a human."

As AI agents join the workplace, IT assumes the role of 'Digital HR'.

Traditional HR

- Manages Human Colleagues
- Focus: Conduct & Performance
- Process: Hiring & Onboarding

Digital HR (IT)



- Manages AI Agents
- Focus: Algorithm Accuracy & Drift
- Process: Procurement & Integration

Artificial intelligence agents must be governed with the same **rigour and high standards** as our human colleagues.

Recruitment: We only 'hire' AI agents that pass rigorous behavioral and technical testing.

We reframe Procurement as Recruitment. This involves a comprehensive evaluation akin to hiring new staff.

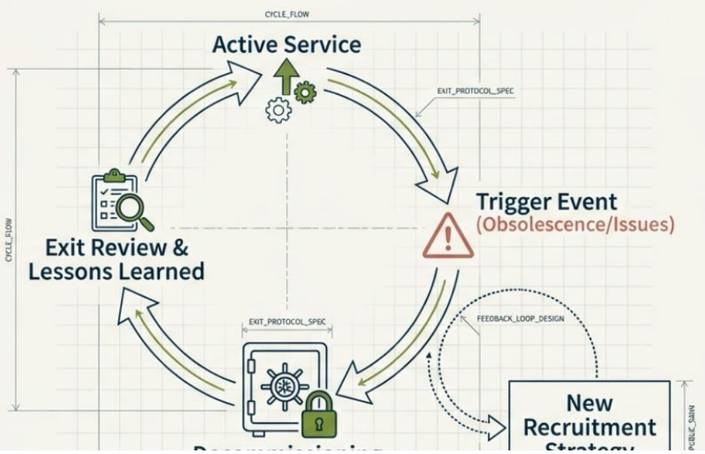
We ensure that only AI solutions meeting our strict requirements for fairness and accuracy are selected.

Documentation is maintained for every decision to support transparency.

Offboarding: A formal process for the secure decommissioning of obsolete agents

When an AI agent reaches the end of its operational life, we execute a formal exit protocol.

- Secure removal of AI models and system access.
- Deletion of associated training data.
- "Exit Interview" to understand reasons for retirement and



ensures **agents do not drift from expected behaviors**

Systematic Monitoring

Much like annual appraisals for staff, AI agents are subject to real-time performance tracking.

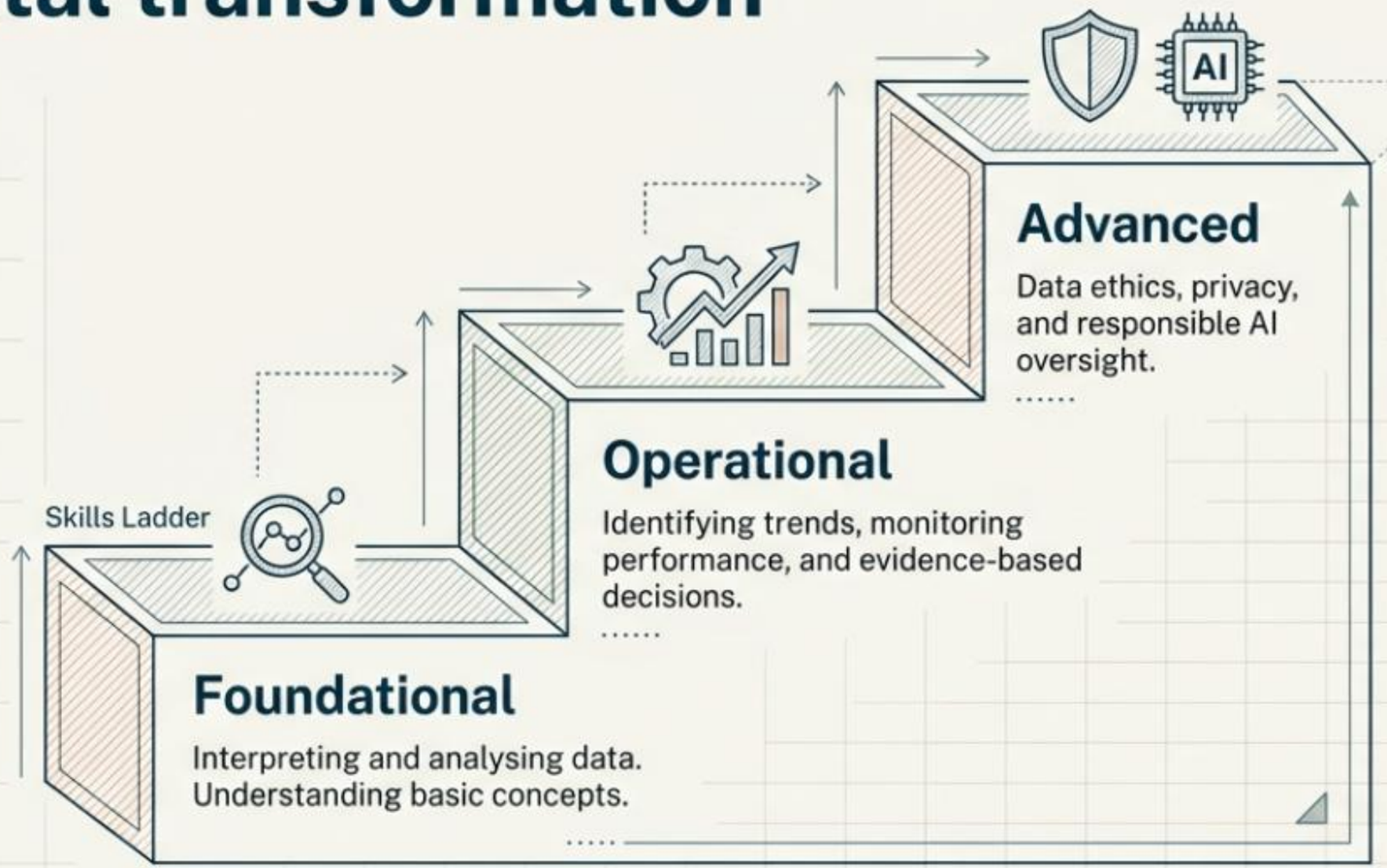
Escalation Protocols

Where agents support critical services, additional scrutiny and periodic human review are applied.

Feedback Loop

Clear channels for staff or residents to raise concerns about agent outputs.

Data Literacy: Empowering our human workforce to lead the digital transformation

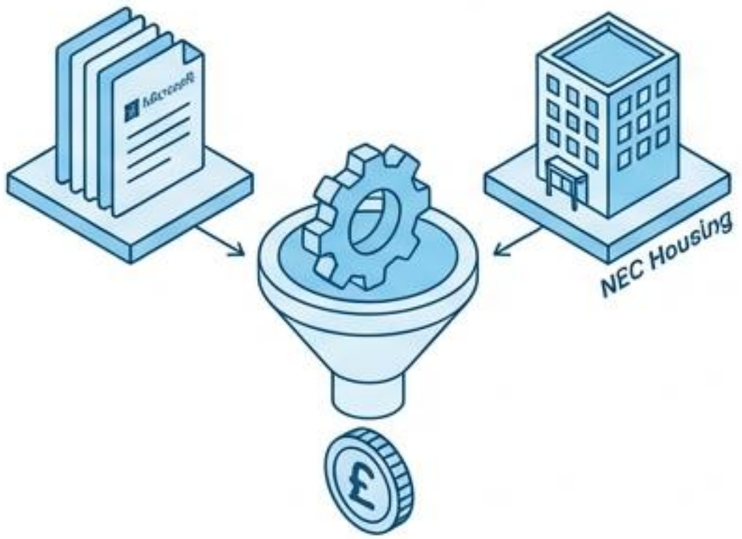


We are implementing a comprehensive suite of training programmes for all employees. Our goal is to ensure staff are confident leveraging data as a strategic asset, not just a technical resource.

Pillar 3: Future-Ready Technology

Asset Optimisation (Sweating the Assets)

- Maximizing value from existing licenses (Microsoft 365, NEC Housing) before buying new.
- Reviewing underutilized features to avoid waste.



Hybrid Cloud & Business Case First

- Rejection of blanket 'Cloud First' policies.
- Decisions based on ROI, resilience, and UK data sovereignty.
- Balance of On-Premise (Cost/Control) and Public Cloud.

Governance of Low-Code

- Empowering service areas to build workflows (e.g., GovService).
- Secure framework to prevent "Shadow IT".
- Fostering agility with guardrails.

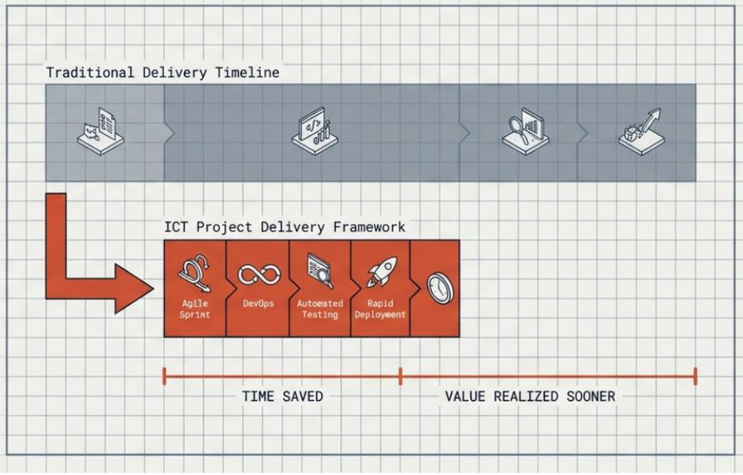
Accelerating Delivery Cycles

The Mechanism:
The ICT Project Delivery Framework.

The Objective:
To significantly shorten the time between 'Initiative' and 'Implementation'.

Resident Impact:
Rapid delivery ensures residents feel the benefits of service enhancements immediately.

Strategic Value:
Operationalizing technological advancements swiftly to maintain a leading position in the sector.



Workforce Empowerment: From Passive to Proactive

The Shift: Moving employees from being "passive recipients of change" to "empowered, proactive participants."

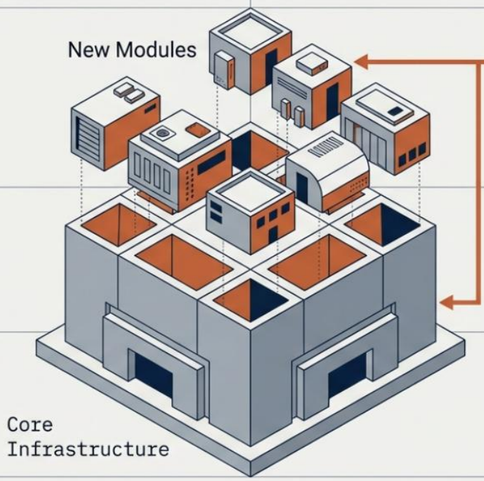
Core Insight: Success depends on a workforce that is adaptable to changing demands.

The Outcome: Staff who possess the skills, confidence, and mindset to drive organizational transformation.

Building for Scale: A Flexible Architecture

Strategic Goal:
Designing IT solutions where scalability is a central principle.

The Driver:
Accommodating future growth and shifting demands without system collapse.

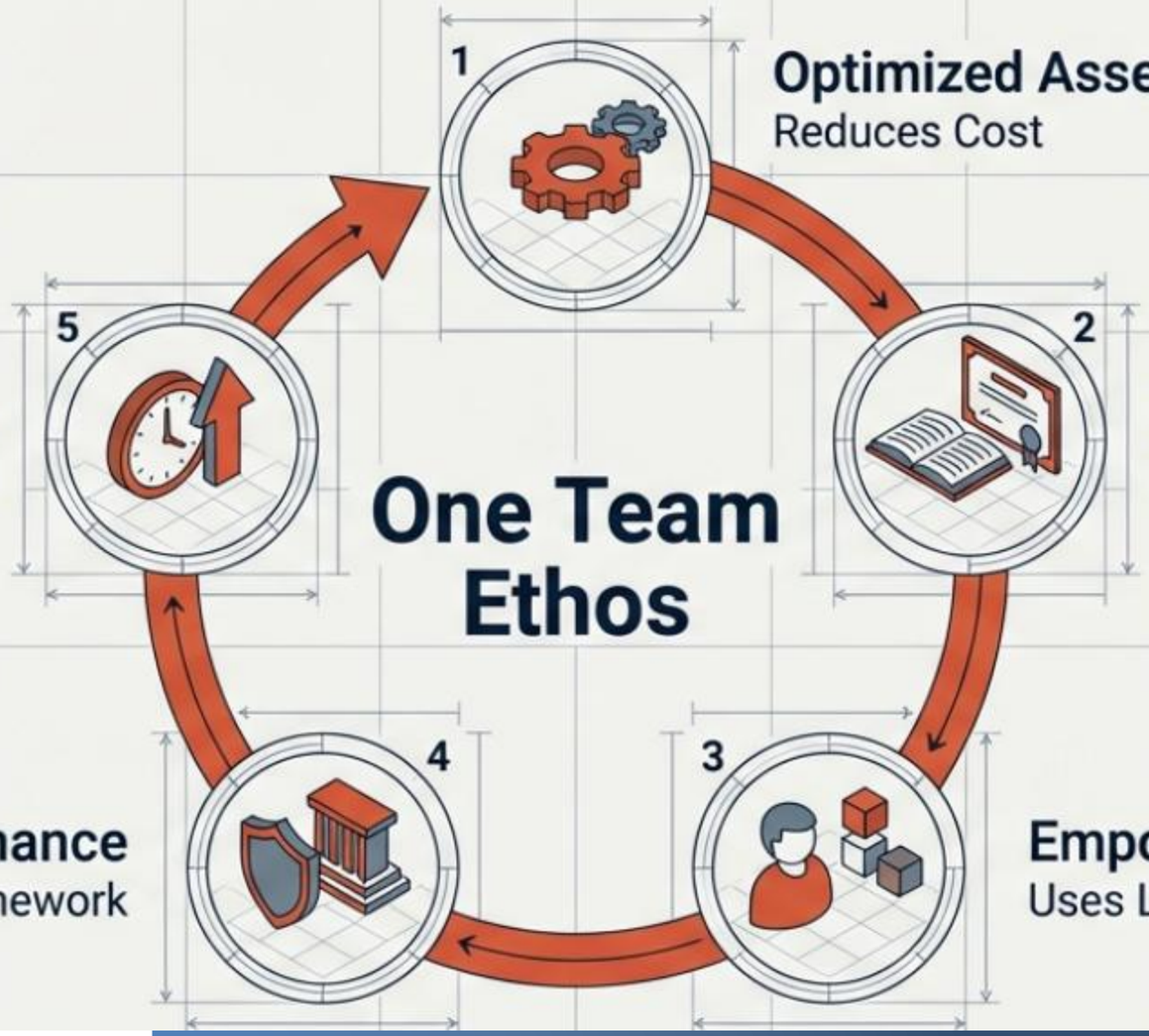


Ready for Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) & Growth.

The Method:
Adoption of Modular Architectures allows for incremental expansion.

This enables the seamless addition of new functionalities or user groups without rebuilding the core.

The Integrated Ecosystem



Empowering the Workforce

A culture of continuous learning and experimentation.

- Mentoring, upskilling, and 'One Team' ethos between ICT and service areas.

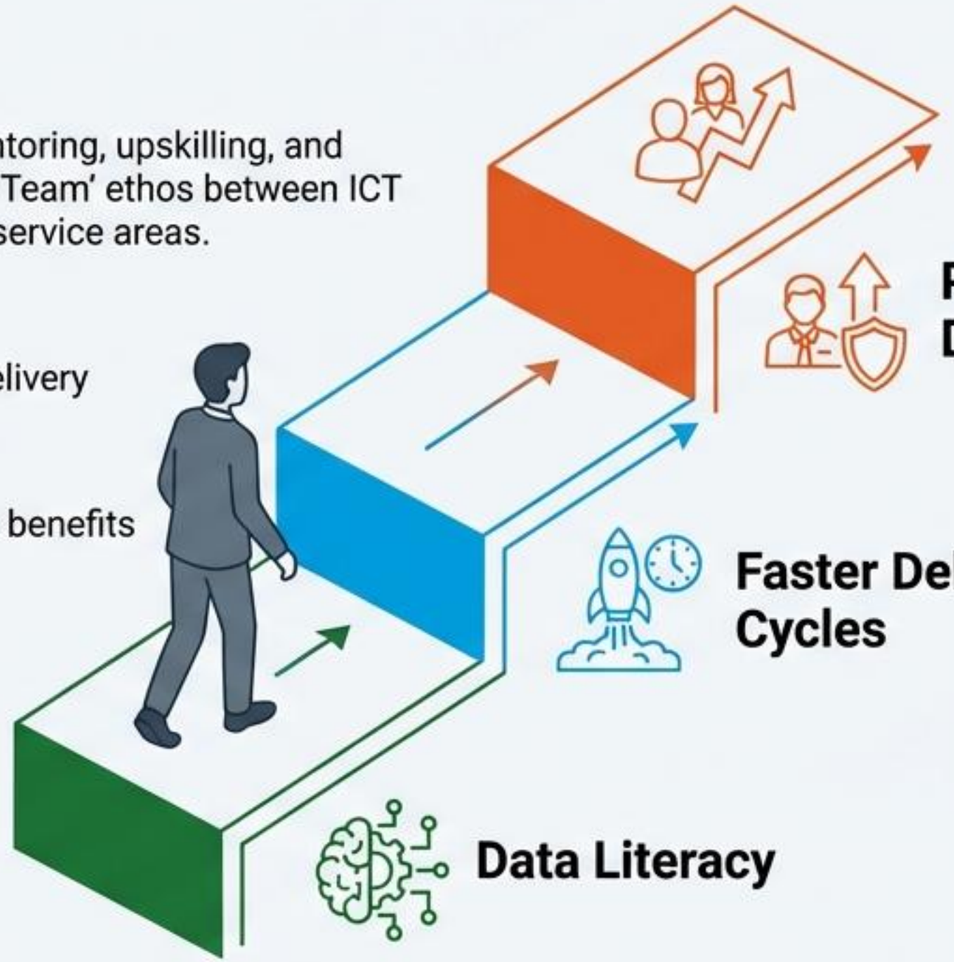
Professional Development

- Adopting an ICT Project Delivery Framework to accelerate time-to-value.
- Ensuring residents feel the benefits without delay.

Faster Delivery Cycles

- Training staff to interpret data and make evidence-based decisions.
- Moving beyond technical skills to data ethics and privacy.

Data Literacy



Resourcing the Vision: Investment & Value

Core Deliverables (Base Budget)

- Maintained within the existing shared service envelope.
- Includes: 'Brilliant Basics,' patching, uptime, and Asset Optimisation.

Strategic Enhancements (Investment Required)

- Subject to individual Business Cases.
- Includes: Widespread AI licensing (e.g., Copilot), major architecture refactoring.
- Requirement: Must demonstrate clear ROI or statutory necessity.

Social Value

Procurement will prioritize local economic growth and community benefits, not just lowest cost.

Strategic Alignment: Stevenage Borough Council

Corporate Priority: ‘Making Stevenage Even Better’

Transforming Our Town

Future-Ready Tech (Pillar 3) provides scalable infrastructure for the £1bn regeneration program.

Scalable Infrastructure: Supporting growth and development.

Thriving Neighborhoods

Active Cyber Resilience (Pillar 1) protects critical resident data and safety.

Protected Resident Data: Ensuring safety and trust.

Technology & Innovation

A cross-cutting theme requiring ‘Asset Optimisation’ to drive efficiency across all services.

Efficiency & Asset Optimisation: Maximising service delivery.

Strategic Alignment: East Herts District Council

Corporate Priority: **LEAF**

Listening: Data Intelligence (Pillar 2) provides the evidence base for transparent decision-making.

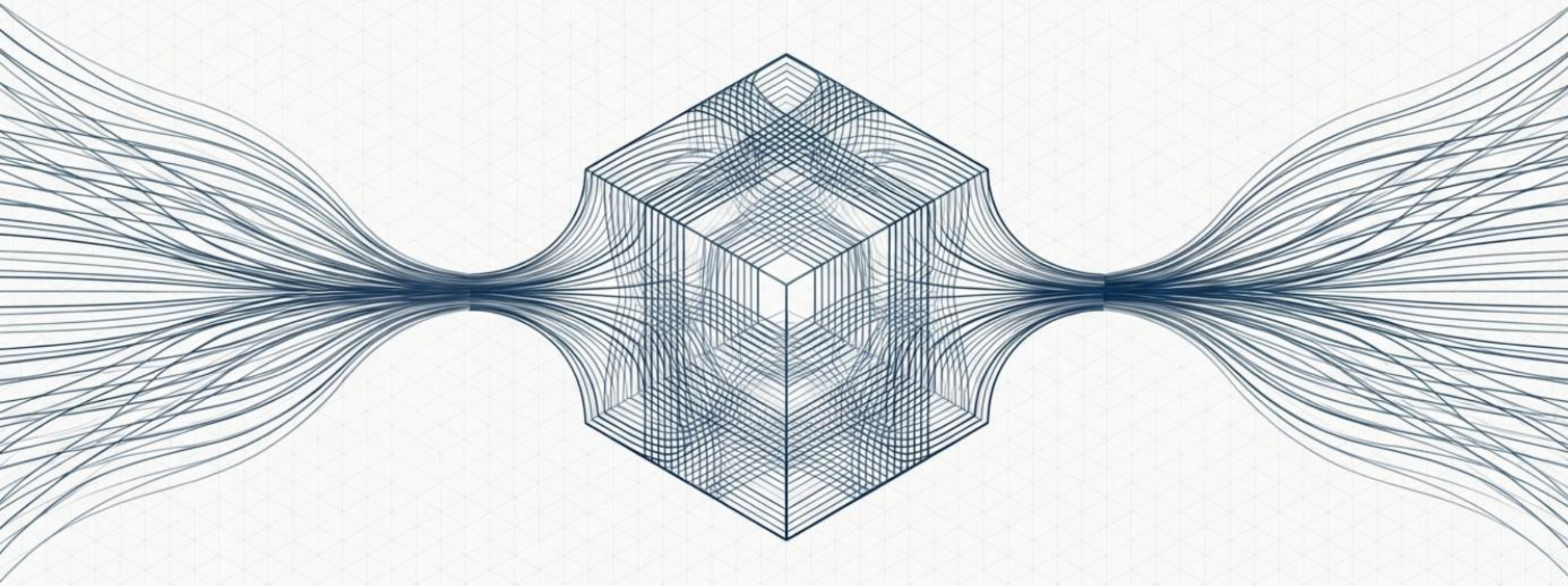
Environmental: Asset Optimisation extends hardware lifecycles, reducing waste and carbon emissions.

Acting with Community: Social Value in procurement supports local businesses and the voluntary sector.

Fair and Inclusive: Accessible systems and workforce empowerment ensure no resident is left behind.

LGR Technology & Systems Transition

Workstream Architecture & Operational Readiness Strategy



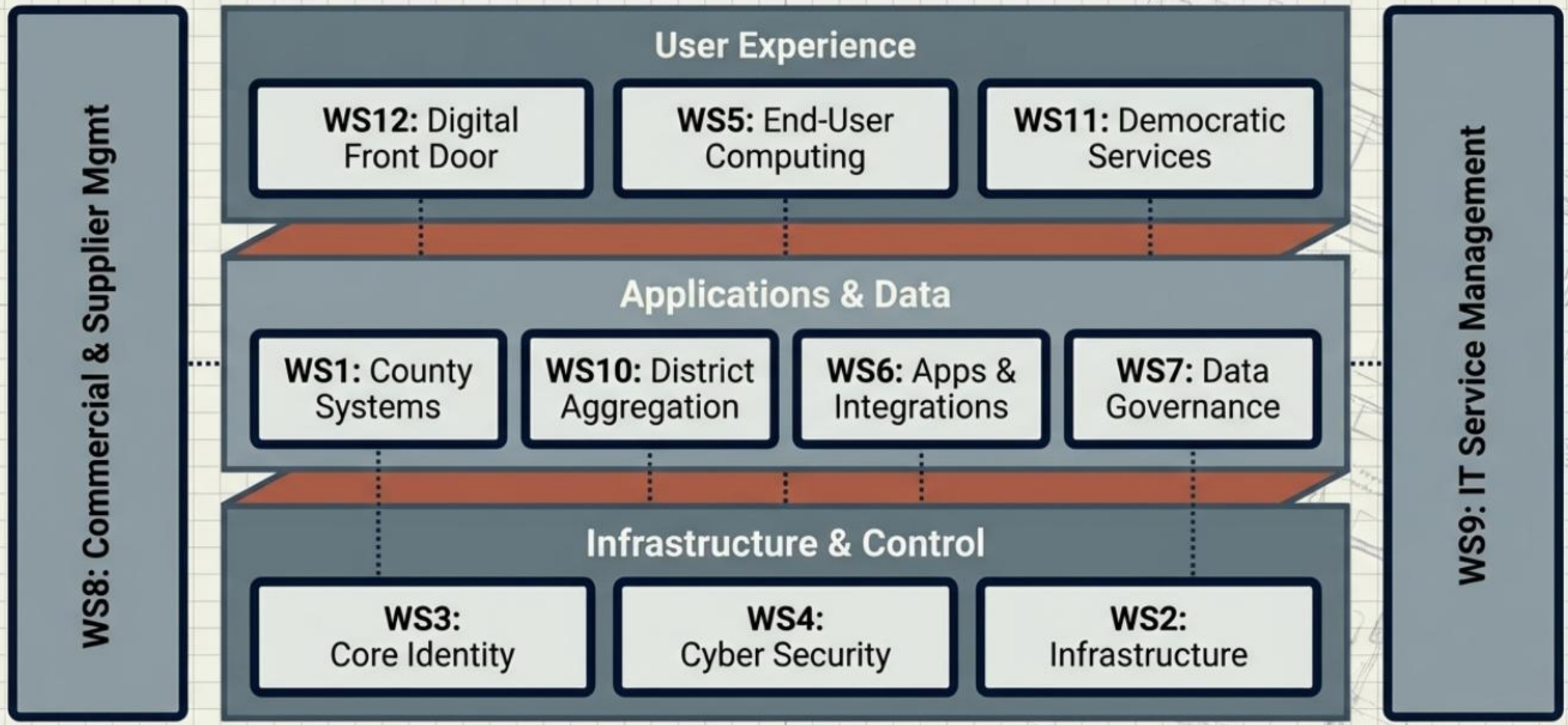
BLUEPRINT FOR DAY 1 READINESS

The Definition of Success: The ‘9am Test’

> “At 9am on Vesting Day, the councils’ technology environments must allow staff and residents to access essential digital services securely and without interruption.”

- **Authentication:** Staff can authenticate successfully using council credentials to access required systems.
- **Core Stability:** Identity, email, networks, and devices are stable; legacy dependencies are abstracted.
- **Critical Apps:** Business-critical applications for statutory services are available.
- **Data Access:** Essential operational data is accessible, accurate, and supported.
- **Security:** Cyber security, backup, and resilience controls are in place.
- **Support:** ITSM arrangements span the full hybrid estate with clear ownership.
- **Public Continuity:** Public-facing digital services remain uninterrupted with no visible degradation.

The Workstream Architecture



Domain 1: Digital Foundations & Security

Key Insight: No system, user, or supplier may operate outside agreed security controls from Day 1.

WS2: Infrastructure & Resilience

Purpose:
Deliver Day-1 connectivity and proven DR capability.

Critical Scope:
WAN architecture, segmented networks, Backup/DR runbooks.

Day-1 Success:
Priority sites connected; DR drills completed with evidence packs; Supplier 'cliffs' mitigated.

WS3: Core Platforms (Identity)

Purpose:
Secure identity as the 'control plane' spanning new and legacy estates.

Critical Scope:
Tenant strategy, MFA implementation, Federation for transitional systems.

Day-1 Success:
100% authentication success; seamless access across hybrid estate.

WS4: Cyber Security & Risk

Purpose:
Operate within acceptable risk posture (Zero Trust baseline).

Critical Scope:
SOC integration, Privileged Access Management (PAM), Incident playbooks.

Day-1 Success:
No critical security failures; Transitional risks formally accepted and time-bound.

Domain 2: The User Experience

Key Insight: Internal complexity must be invisible at the point of contact.

WS5: End-User Computing (EUC)

Purpose:
Staff can 'turn on, connect, and work' immediately.

Critical Scope:
Device inventory, VDI bridging for legacy apps,
Telephony migration

Day-1 Success:
Users productive immediately; Legacy apps accessible via managed VDI.

WS11: Democratic Services

Purpose:
Statutory meetings and elections function without disruption.

Critical Scope:
AV for chambers,
Elections technology readiness,
Mock meeting rehearsals.

Day-1 Success:
Statutory meetings delivered seamlessly; Elections systems tested and ready.

WS12: Digital Front Door

Purpose:
A coherent public presence masking internal complexity.

Critical Scope:
Website/Microsites,
CRM/Contact Centre,
Email routing logic.

Day-1 Success:
Residents transact without confusion; No visible break between front door and service delivery.

Domain 3: Business Applications & Service Continuity

Key Insight: Continuity takes precedence over consolidation.

WS1: Successor Delivery (County Systems)

Purpose

Ensure County-only systems (Social Care, Highways) have a lawful home.

Critical Scope

Identifying 'Successor Delivery Entities' (Host authority, Caretaker, or Joint Entity).

Day-1 Success

Every system has a legal host and accountable owner; Statutory services continuous.

WS6: Apps & Integrations

Purpose

Minimum viable integration blueprint for statutory flows.

Critical Scope

Integration mapping, Day-1 monitoring runbooks, Critical interface testing.

Day-1 Success

Business-critical apps available; Integration failures do not stop service delivery.

WS10: District Aggregation

Purpose

Aggregating district services without destabilizing county-wide systems.

Critical Scope

Dependency mapping between tiers; Decisions on 'Retain vs. Aggregate.'

Day-1 Success

No unmanaged shared dependencies; County-only services remain stable.

Domain 4: Data, Governance & Commercial Enablers

Key Insight: Every service must have a named accountable owner and lawful contracting authority.

WS7: Data & Information Governance

Purpose:
Lawful data control and access from Day-1.

Critical Scope:
Data controller models, FOI workflow continuity, Statutory MI/Reporting.

Day-1 Success:
Operational data accessible; FOI clock maintained; Statutory returns produced on time.

WS8: Commercial & Supplier

Purpose:
Lawful, affordable contracts with clear authority.

Critical Scope:
Contract Novation/Assignment, License continuity, Supplier readiness.

Day-1 Success:
No unsupported service; All contracts valid and assigned to a specific entity.

WS9: ITSM & Operations

Purpose:
A supportable estate with clear escalation paths.

Critical Scope:
Unified Service Desk, Major Incident/Hypercare Command Centre.

Day-1 Success:
Users know how to get help; Incident response spans the hybrid/legacy estate.

Elections for Shadow Authority – 7 May 2027

- Members: 234 to 261 elected members.

Role of the Shadow Authority

- Provides governance continuity through transition.
- Approves budget, constitution, senior appointments.
- Oversees service continuity and transition planning.

Vesting Day 1st April 2028

- Website
- Telephony for the Customer Service Centre
- Payroll
- HR System
- Finance System
- Payment Systems
- 11 Workstreams

The Action Plan

Brilliant Basics

- Maintaining high uptime
- Robust patching and maintenance
- Optimising existing tools (such as M365 and NEC Housing)
- Ensuring every colleague has the equipment, connectivity, and support needed to deliver services effectively

Local Government Reorganisation

- WS1: Successor Delivery, County Systems/Services Transition Review & Planned Transitional Service Delivery
- WS2: Infrastructure, Hosting, Connectivity & Resilience (WAN, Backup/DR)
- WS3: Core Digital Platforms, Microsoft 365, Identity & Email Security
- WS4: Cyber Security, Risk, Monitoring & Compliance (Zero Trust, SOC, PAM)
- WS5: End-User Computing, Devices, VDI, Telephony & User Readiness
- WS6: Applications, Integrations & Digital Services Enablement
- WS7: Data, Records, Information Governance, FOI & Corporate/Statutory MI
- WS8: Supplier, Commercial, Licensing & Contract Transition (Novation/Assignment/Re-Procurement)
- WS9: IT Service Management, Operations, Adoption & Hypercare
- WS10: District Service Aggregation & Shared System Alignment (incl. systems shared across tiers)
- WS11: Democratic Services, AV & Elections Technology Readiness
- WS12 (Supplementary): Customer, Resident & Voter Digital Front Door

Pillar 1: Active Cyber Resilience

- Enhanced Cyber Defences
- War Gaming & Recovery Testing
- Cybersecurity Awareness & Culture:
- Incident Response Protocols:

Pillar 2: Data Intelligence & Ethical AI

- Ethical & UK-Hosted AI:
- Governance of the "Digital Workforce"
- Data Governance & Quality:
- Data Literacy:
- Data Sharing & Interoperability:

Pillar 3: Future-Ready Tech & Culture

- Asset Optimisation (Sweating the Assets):
- Governance of Low-Code Development:
- Hybrid Cloud Strategy (Business Case First):
- Building for Scale (Flexible Architecture):
- Faster Delivery Cycles (ICT Project Delivery Framework):
- Workforce Empowerment & Continuous Learning: