



2022 - 2025

Digital by Default and ICT Strategy



**Torridge District
Council**

Introduction

Channel Shift - There is little doubt that the pace of change is increasing, with more of our customers using smart phones and tablets, and expecting to interact with us online and digitally, much like they do with their bank, supermarket, and other suppliers.

Providing digital services that internal and external customers can have confidence in is reliant on a robust ICT infrastructure. This strategy is a combined approach to make sure that the council has digital capabilities considering culture, practices, processes, and technologies.

It means working to a set of principles, focusing on user needs, and a commitment to making services digital by default, so that they are simpler, clearer, and faster for users.

The council is a signatory to the [Local Digital Declaration](#). That means we are committed to:

- ✓ **Redesigning our services around the needs of the people using them**
- ✓ **Breaking our dependence on inflexible and expensive technology that doesn't join up effectively, in favour of modular common components and open data standards**
- ✓ **Demonstrating digital leadership, creating the conditions for genuine organisational transformation**
- ✓ **Designing safe, secure, and useful ways of sharing information to build trust among our partners and citizens**
- ✓ **Embedding an open culture that values, incentivises and expects working in the open wherever we can, sharing our plans and experience, working collaboratively with other organisations, and reusing good practice**

Strategic Direction

The Council's Strategic Plan 2020-23 sets out what the Council wants to achieve for Torridge and how we are going to achieve it.

Our Vision is "Torridge a great place to live, work and visit" and the strategic themes that support this vision are:

Theme 1 Local Economy
Theme 2 Communities, Health, and Housing
Theme 3 Our Environment Our Future
Theme 4 Our Council

These are underpinned by a commitment to professional, high performing service delivery.

This Digital by Default & ICT Strategy seeks to complement and support the delivery of the Strategic Plan together with our operational business plans.

At a time when expectation and demand is increasing and the resources, we have available for us are reducing we must find new delivery methods that meet both the demands and efficiencies required of us.

Our ICT environment will be secure, accessible, and maintained to the highest standards. Our core platforms, systems, hardware, and devices must be fit for purpose and fit for the future. Our technology will enable and empower all of our users rather than add complexity to the work they do.

Our systems and applications will be available to all of us, wherever we need to work from. They will operate at the latest versions and will be fully supported by our suppliers, and we will, where applicable, continue to provide platforms and software in the cloud where it is economically viable to do so. We will maximise the use of existing systems and past investment whilst embracing technological advances to deliver a truly flexible and mobile working environment that is fit for the digital age.

Why Digital by Default?

Digital by Default is a keyway of both reducing costs and improving the service to our customers, whilst not forcing away those customers who still need to use traditional channels such as telephone or in person visits.

Torrige has recognised the need to 'shift' but also accepts this will need to be achieved through 'nudge' methods for it to gain wider acceptance as a strategic approach. It must be recognised that the greatest level of channel shift comes from offering better, simplified and more integrated digital solutions.

Providing self-service access to information and services at a time and by a range of channels that are convenient for the customer.

Benefits include:

- ✓ making sure digital services and content are accessible to all
- ✓ creating a consistent experience across all channels
- ✓ more effective and efficient customer engagement

The business case for channel shift, in itself, is very compelling. As the table below shows, the cost of servicing a customer electronically, via the website, is a small fraction of that of seeing them face to face, or cost of them calling in.

Channel	Cost per 'visit' (average of Deloitte & Socitm research)
Face to face	£11.44
Telephone	£2.30
Website	32p

Where Are We Now?

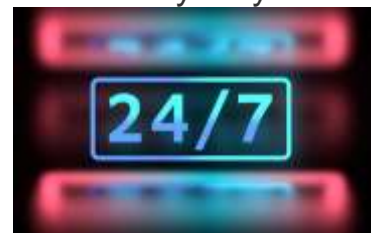
The Council has been monitoring incoming work channels (website visitors, email traffic, telephone calls, visitors to reception, etc) for a number of years and this has enabled us to verify a clear shift in customer behaviours vis-à-vis their interaction with our officers. We have seen a significant/long-term fall off in physical visitors to our reception sites and reductions in telephone traffic; there has been an ongoing trend in using email as the primary source of contact with officers and growing levels of activity on our website.

We have already responded to this behavioural shift in our customers by enabling access to our services in a way which meets those customer expectations and enhances the levels of services our customers receive. This has been happening in a number of ways:



Our website has been re-designed to ensure that our on-line services are easy to use and simple to follow

Our on-line services are available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year



New products and services (e.g. the garden waste scheme) are available digitally to our customers



We have implemented a robust work from anywhere solution to increase staff productivity



We have identified opportunities to use Social Media to further promote and deliver our services



This Digital by Default strategy highlights the next step in this process.

What We Will Do Next

1. Robust, secure, and reliable ICT

We will continue to provide a secure, resilient, and reliable core infrastructure and we will upgrade the Council's Physical and Virtual Microsoft server estate.

We will take all measures necessary to protect our network against cyber-attacks and to ensure robust arrangements are in place to deliver service continuity in the event of a component failure or other adverse incident.

We will develop a Cyber Security Policy to help improve our cyber defences and provide direction to help address the ever-changing threat.

2. Secure by design

The security of our systems and data is of overriding importance. Information security will be designed into all our systems, changes, and processes right from the start.

3. Council in the Cloud

Cloud-hosted platforms and software provide an opportunity to move away from costly, locally hosted solutions towards better value in terms of access, service reliability and security.

We will reduce our local infrastructure through a preference that systems will be vendor or cloud hosted where it is cost effective to do so.

Benefits include:

- reduced footprint – smaller data centre (or none)
- specialist support – provided by supplier
- optimisation – reducing costs over time
- Disaster Recovery and Business Continuity improvements
- Increased security

4. Website

We will continue to update our new website and promote channel shift through making more services available as online self-service whether for information requests, transactions, or reporting; increase integration with 'line of business' systems to enable more efficient processes and greater transparency.

5. Printing & scanning review

We will review all the printing and scanning throughout the Council and produce an Options Report to feed into the procurement of a new contract and provide options for improved printing and scanning.

One of the aims of the review would be to make a positive impact on our climate commitment, through a continued reduction in the use of paper and associated services like postage.

6. Continue the implementation of Microsoft 365

We will aim to maximise the potential of the Microsoft 365 platform to support council-based innovation and development and find new opportunities to help deliver the maximum benefit for staff and customers.

7. Information assets and data

Maintain quality, confidentiality, integrity, and availability of data and enable use of comprehensive and powerful data analysis and manipulation tools. We will introduce a modern corporate GIS system that is an interactive and useful GIS tool available to staff and the public making better use of the data that we hold.

Benefits include:

- ✓ accurate and timely reporting to make informed decisions
- ✓ analysis giving intelligence and enabling predictions, to aid decision making and policy shaping
- ✓ data quality management
- ✓ data security and protection

8. Improving digital skills

The Council will actively enhance the digital skills and cyber awareness of the workforce, the digital leadership and cyber awareness skills of senior managers and elected members to make optimal use of software and ICT.

Benefits include:

- ✓ digitally enabled workforce – comfortable with the tools they use
- ✓ cyber aware and
- ✓ development skills
- ✓ building digital services
- ✓ digital by default principles in everything we do

9. Modern telephony

We will review our current telephony system and investigate cloud-based telephone system to provide improved capabilities, improved resilience and simplified telephony for services and customers.

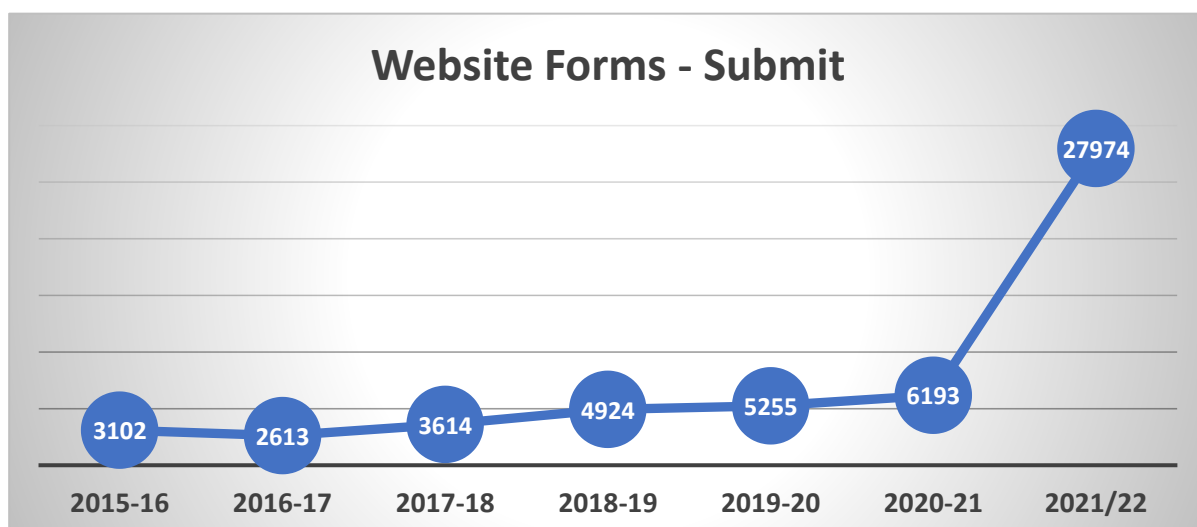
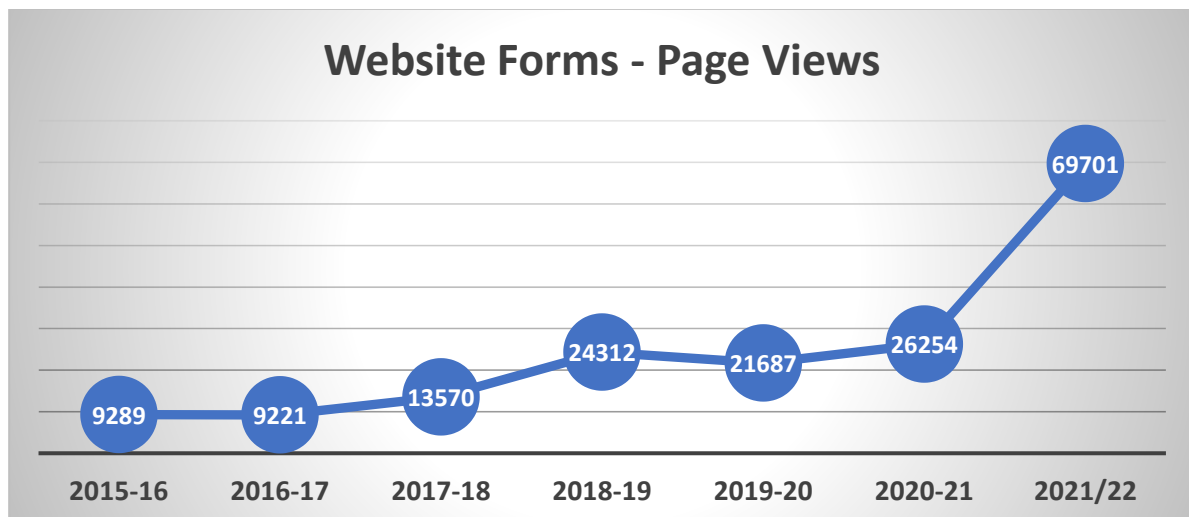
10. Continuous improvement

- We will work with Services across the Council to review processes, redesign workflow, ensuring best use of software and technology and adding website forms to help increase productivity and the service to our customers.
- We will also continue to develop the capabilities of the ICT Service Desk through the introduction of a range of self-help capabilities and greater automation of routine tasks.
- We will review, improve and redesign our disaster recovery and business continuity plans and technologies around cloud-based technologies.
- We will review and replace our legacy ICT code base systems.

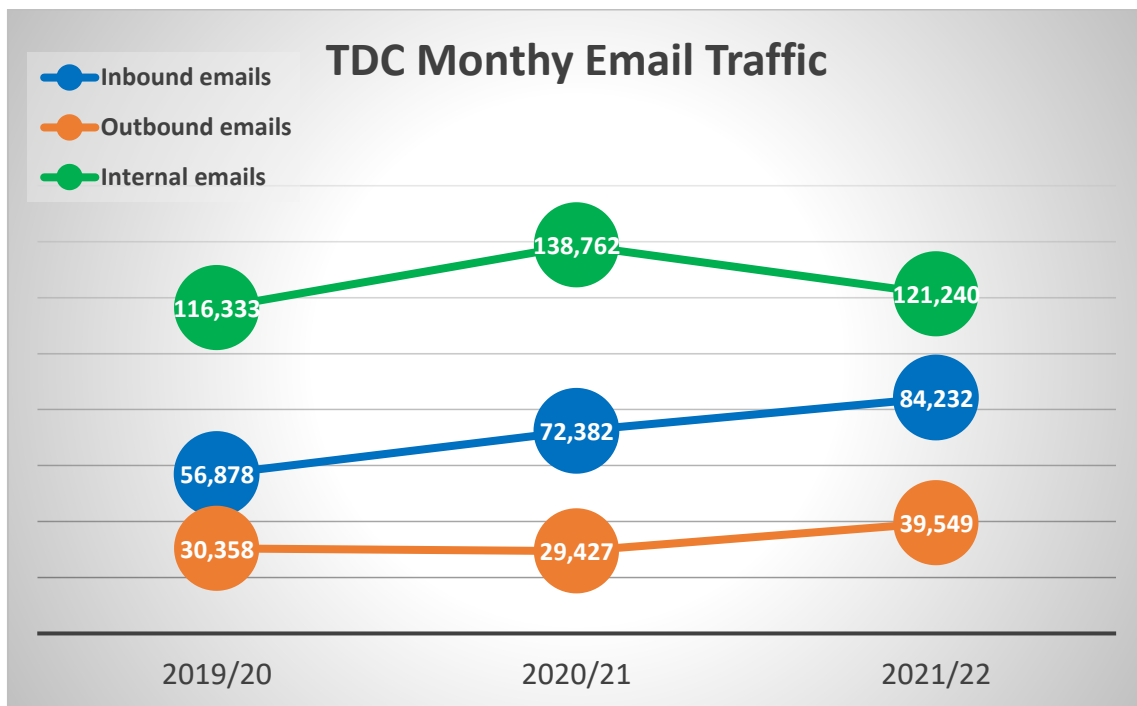
It is essential that we can monitor progress and ensure that the work we are doing is delivering a tangible difference to our customers and enhancing the effective operation of the Council's services. Therefore, this strategy will be supported by the measurement of performance indicators associated with the digital interactions with the Council. Progress will be reported periodically to the Strategic Management Team and via the QBR.

In addition to reporting the number of visitors to our website, we will also report on activity on our website in terms of page views and submits, allowing us to analyse how many customers are viewing information on our website, and how many are performing on-line transactions.

As services re-design their work processes and provide on-line forms for customers to interact more effectively with the Council, we will see further increases in these parameters.



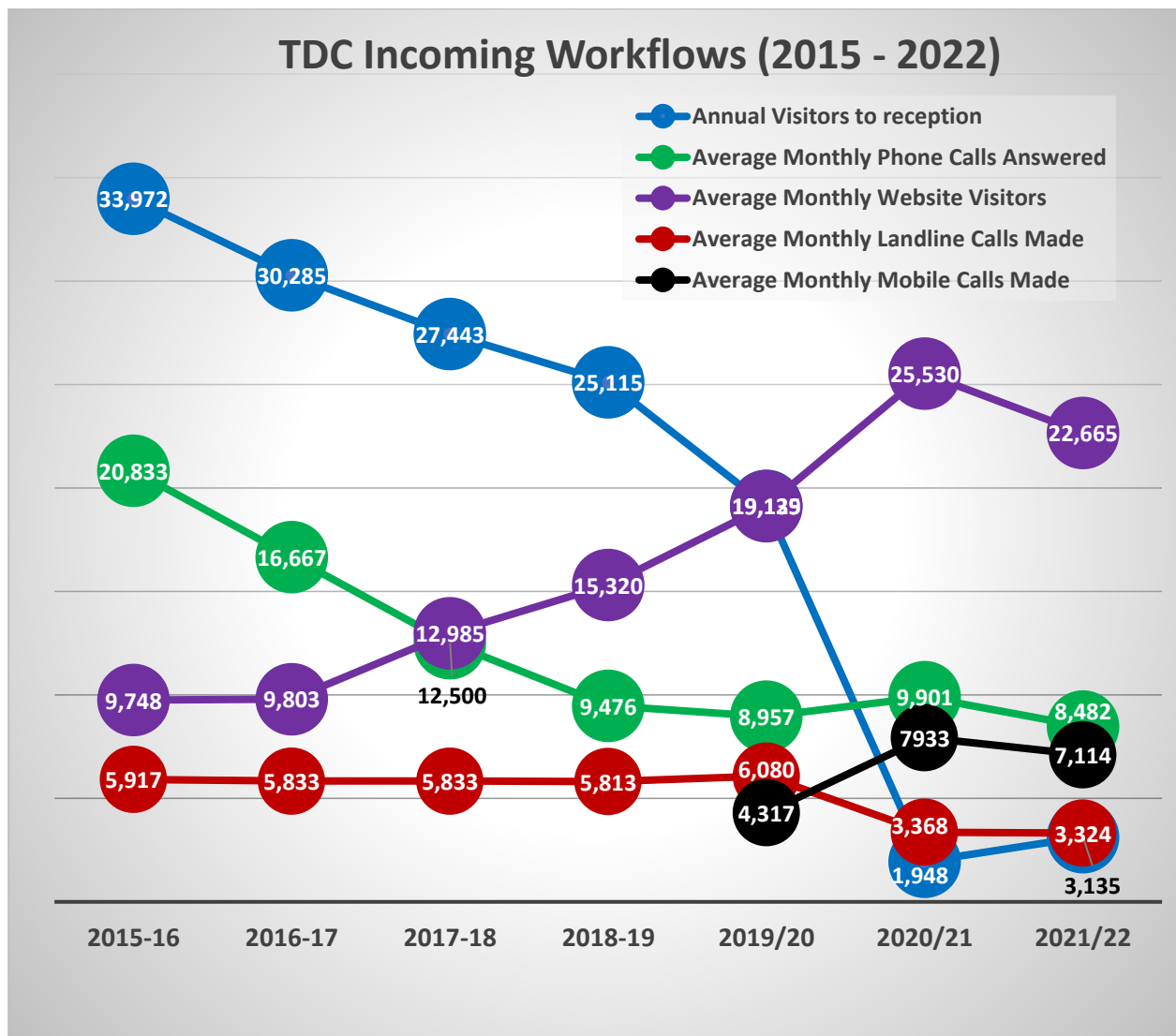
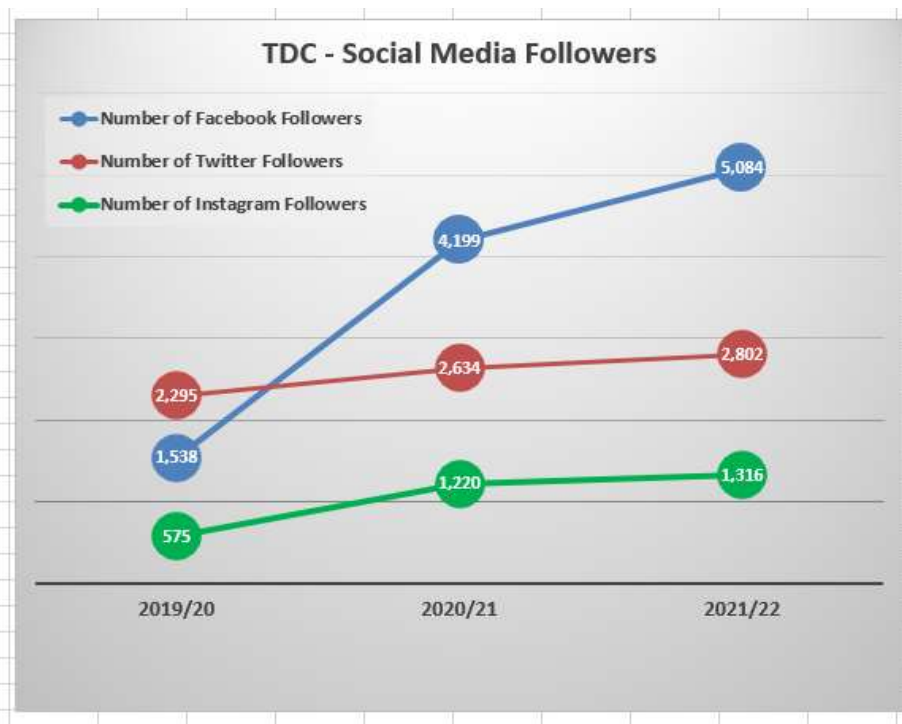
Note: The figures for 2021/22 were distorted by the implementation of the new website and the Covid crisis and are not a representative data set for future benchmarking.



(only 3 year email data available due to a change of system)

Data collated over the past seven years shows that the trend is a move away from the older/analogue means of customer contact towards digital means.

- Inbound email traffic has gone up by almost 50% over the last 2 years
- Website visitors has been increasing by 20% year. The 10% reduction this year is due to the new website launch and the cookies policy
- Phone traffic has been declining (the lockdown year in 2020/21 distorted this). Landline calls made have reduced (homeworking). Outbound calls have risen (we now have mobile stats so we are reporting more calls).
- Physical visitors to reception was reducing by 10% a year, but fell by 90% during lockdown. We have seen a 60% increase in 2021/22.
- Social Media followers continue to rise and this should continue as Comms users additional/more modern platforms



TDC - Customer Contacts - Change to Digital

