What is it?

Aberdeen City Council's digital transformation allowed it to respond well to the challenges of the covid-19 pandemic [source: Aberdeen City Council BVAR 2021]

Who is involved?

Aberdeen City Council, working closely with its business partner.

What did they do?

In 2016, the council approved its digital strategy 'Being digital', 'to change how we do business to meet outcomes and customer's expectations through digital solutions'. The strategy focuses on three areas: improving customer services, improving staff experience and improving how resources are used. It is underpinned by six design principles:

- Design services with our customers at the centre
- Present easy to use, integrated and standard interfaces
- Build services, not just websites
- Hold information once and securely
- Use data well
- Make sure the foundations work

In 2019, the council began working with a business partner to maximise how it uses digital technology to improve services.

The council, working closely with its business partner, has substantially delivered on its digital strategy: For example:

- paper-based processes have largely been digitised and customers can now access more services online
- new cloud-based systems have been procured to allow more mobile working and greater use of real time data
- a peer learning model has been adopted with over 500 digital champions, and a number of service specific super champions, supporting employees to learn to use new technologies.
- a chatbot, AB1, has been developed to provide instant online responses to customer and staff queries. Queries related to bin collections, council tax, education or annual leave and payroll are now routed through AB1.
- Robotic Process Automation (RPA) has been implemented in several service areas, including education, finance and social care to remove routine tasks, releasing capacity for staff to support front-line. In Education services the equivalent of 14 FTE teacher's worth of administration was removed.

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What went well and what were the challenges?

- LEADERSHIP: Clear vision. Commitment from leadership to embedding the cultural changes associated with changing working practices. The council strengthened its digital leadership and direction to focus on communicating changes to staff, with staff surveys suggesting this has been effectively achieved.
- DIGITAL WORKFORCE: Large digital champions network in place to support staff. The council invested in digital leadership for its managers and engaged the workforce to understand their needs to improve adoption of technology. Staff trained by business partner to manage chatbot.
- TECHNOLOGY AND DATA: Decommissioned legacy systems and moved applications and data to cloud-based systems. Better use and sharing of data. Developed data sharing principles
- COLLABORATION: Established good working relationships with partners as well as knowledge transfer
- INNOVATION: the first Scottish council to develop chatbots to automate initial customer and staff queries

• digital initiatives and efficiencies have underpinned many of the £125 million savings delivered so far in the council's wider transformation programme. The progress made in adopting digital practices and the investment in cloud-based systems and devices for staff, meant that the council was well prepared to respond to the covid-19 pandemic. Within days, staff were working from home to keep essential services running and there was rapid update of video conferencing and messaging apps like Microsoft Teams. The council updated its chatbot AB1 to respond to high demand - approximately 200 individual queries per day - for covid-19 information and it successfully responded to over 80 per cent of customer enquiries. The progress made against the digital strategy has also been beneficial for partnership working during the pandemic. There is now greater sharing of data between Community Planning Partners and work is ongoing to further develop collaborative datasets to inform how services can be targeted to meet demand and customer requirements.	