EEBC – Information Technology Strategy 2023

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Information Technology Strategy

Purpose of this Strategy

This Information Technology (IT) Strategy defines the principles, governance, standards and methodology by which Epsom & Ewell Borough Council (EEBC) will source, procure, implement, maintain and deliver IT services. Its main purpose is to ensure that IT services, of whatever nature, are aligned to business requirements and complement each other within a holistic service ecosystem.

To achieve this, the IT Strategy is but one element in a suite of documents which clearly link ("The Golden Thread") the council's long-term vision for the borough to corporate, department, team and individual deliverables.

Figure 1: The IT Strategy in a corporate context.

Benefits of this Strategy

The benefits of this IT Strategy are:-

- A clear vision of where we want to be and what is important to us.
- Clear principles by which our services are selected and delivered.
- A defined governance framework within which IT Services are managed.

Constraints

This IT Strategy defines 'where we are', 'where we want to be' and the principles we will use to move from one state to the other. It also defines our agreed, priorities. This strategy is, by its very nature, high-level and consequently its vision is not constrained by the inevitable pressures and limits on the resources (people, financial, technical) required to deliver it. Rather, these will be considered (partially) within the roadmap and fully at the point of project initiation.

Background

IT services within EEBC have grown organically over many years. Whilst the services may broadly be said to have met basic EEBC business requirements, this organic and uncoordinated growth has resulted in systems that are disjointed and which are perceived by users as slow and difficult to use. IT services are viewed as a necessary but expensive overhead which provides limited value, although it should be noted that the failure to derive value is a consequence of multiple factors including a wider internal failure to truly embrace technology and modernise business processes.

To address these issues, in Spring 2022, following on from the global Covid pandemic, a wide-reaching review was instigated with the aim to ensure EEBC IT services could meet the near-term and future requirements of the organisation. Maple Networks were commissioned to undertake this review. The outcome of the IT Strategic Review provided a clear understanding of the current state of EEBC IT services, the capabilities of both the IT Team and the wider user base, constraints (technical, financial, resource and skills) and a clear set of tactical and strategic objectives to better align IT Services with the requirements of the organisation.

The review noted that there had been a long-term underinvestment in IT services and that, in part as a consequence of this, there was a significant level of aged, legacy systems and stored technical debt[1]. This legacy and underinvestment (in time, resource, money) being the main driver for the IT Team to become increasingly reactionary and siloed in its delivery of services to the organisation. The report also noted that despite the multiple challenges and constraints, recent progress had been made in remediating a number (although by no means all) of the legacy issues and stabilising the infrastructure platform upon which IT services are delivered.

This EEBC IT Strategy builds on the findings of that review and defines the framework in which future EEBC IT services will be delivered.

IT Service Goals

The IT Service Review afforded the opportunity to set clearly defined goals for the future delivery of IT services. These are summarised as:-

- The infrastructure should be highly available, highly secure, and high performing, providing the flexibility and agility for the council to deliver services as required and at pace.
- The application landscape should be simplified, centralised and easy to use, with particular focus on resident facing applications including the website and obtaining access to their data.
- The internal user experience should be improved, thereby enabling increased officer mobility, effectiveness and efficiency.

[1] Technical debt arises from lack of investment (resources, time, financial) in the IT ecosystem. If unplanned and unmanaged, over time technical debt leads to inefficiencies, an inability to innovate and progress, poor performance and increased costs to maintain systems that do not meet business requirements.

- The resident experience of public facing services should be reviewed and improved. Online resident services should be easy and intuitive to use, thereby encouraging channel shift to more efficient means of engagement and service delivery[2].
- Data should be consolidated with a single point of truth (Golden record).
- All systems and data should be secure.

IT Service Principles

To meet the identified service goals, IT services will be scoped, sourced, implemented and delivered in accordance with the following principles:

Cloud Centric

In line with the Government's Cloud First policy, IT services will be sourced and delivered through Cloud services as opposed to on-premise hardware and software. Adopting this approach will enable the council to migrate away from on-premise hardware and software, which are increasingly difficult and costly to maintain, onto services and platforms which are modern, scalable, resilient and secure.

There are various forms of "Cloud" and in migrating services EEBC will adopt the following approach.

1. Software_as_a_Service (SaaS)
   SaaS is the provision of cloud based applications and software solutions. Implicit within SaaS is the provision of the application and the underpinning hardware, operating system, middle-ware and management software. Examples of those currently used by EEBC are Microsoft 365 (Email and MS-Office applications such as Word and Excel), Civica Financials and iTrent (HR).
2. Platform_as_a_Service (PaaS)
   PaaS sits between SaaS and IaaS. In a PaaS environment you rent the hardware (like IaaS) and additionally the operating system, database management and development tools.
3. Infrastructure_as_a_Service (IaaS)
   IaaS is a type of cloud computing service where compute, storage, and networking resources are rented on demand. Effectively you are renting hardware only, installing and managing the operating system and other software or applications yourself.
4. On-Premise consists of hardware and software which is typically owned outright and is run and managed by internal teams with 3rd party supporting contracts.

[2] Channel shift must consider and address individual requirements arising from disability (disability discrimination act) and/or socio economic deprivation. This will involve working with residents/citizen panels to ensure customer needs are properly defined.

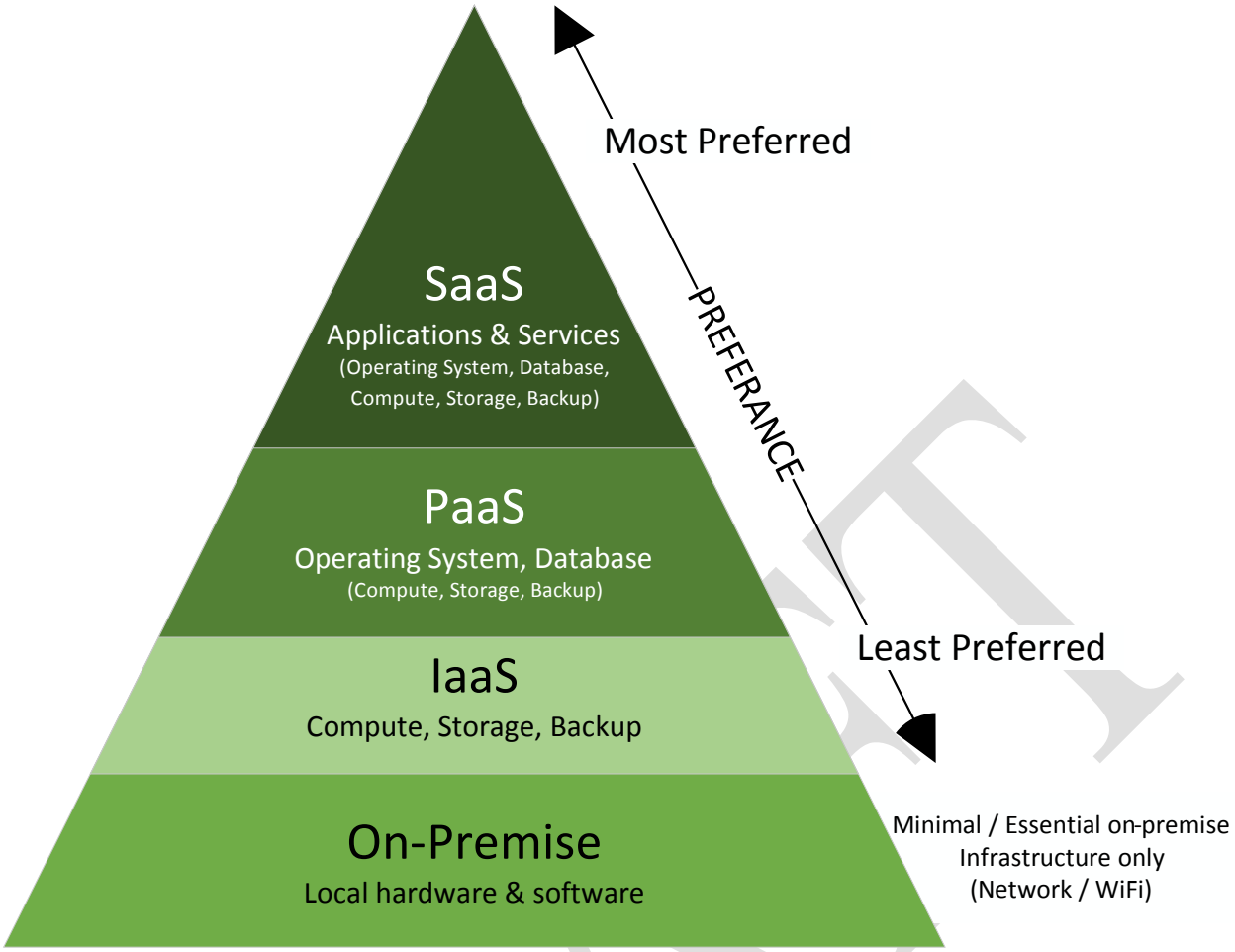

Figure 2: Cloud adoption preference.

Customer Centric

In procuring IT services we will ensure that;

- The customer (whether that be internal colleagues, external residents, or both) is at the forefront of our choice of service.
- IT services are intuitive and easy to use.
- IT services are reliable and available when required.
- Staff are trained and supported in order to derive the greatest value from our digital services

Digital by Default

Our IT services will be designed as part of a holistic ecosystem to;

- Provide (authorised) staff with a seamless view of the customer.
- Enable the customer to access the services they consume regardless of the backend application in which their data is held.
- Enable business process reengineering and automation to be implemented, thereby increasing service efficiency and data accuracy.

Secure by Default

Our IT services will be;

- Secure from internal and external threats.
- Maintained and patched to the appropriate level.
- Current (in contract and mainstream support). By direct consequence all existing, non-current, legacy systems will be decommissioned.
- Used by staff who are appropriately trained in IT security.

Interlinked with Corporate Strategies & Plans

In addition to the four core principles set out above, IT services will align with and actively support the principles and outcomes defined in related corporate strategies and plans.

- Accommodation Strategy:
    - IT services will support and facilitate the developing corporate accommodation strategy by ensuring that end user devices and applications enable flexible work styles, mobility and collaboration, thereby potentially reducing the overall office space requirement.
    - The migration to Cloud services and related reduction in on-premise hardware will reduce the requirement for dedicated IT equipment rooms and associated power usage.
- Climate Change Action Plan:
    - The migration to power efficient Cloud services and related reduction in on-premise hardware will significantly reduce IT related power use[3], supporting the council's aim of becoming carbon neutral by 2035.
    - The deployment and use of laptops will better support officers to work flexibly, reducing travel and associated emissions.
- Workforce Strategy:
    - The implementation of appropriate devices, services and training will enable staff to work seamlessly from multiple locations and become more effective and efficient in the tasks they perform. This will support staff wellbeing, making the council a more attractive place to work and supporting staff retention.

IT Service Governance

We will implement a governance structure which ensures that;

- IT (in conjunction with Senior Management Team) own the IT Strategy and all IT resources.
- Our agreed IT Strategy principles are adhered to.
- There is the required clarity on reporting channels and approval processes (inc: Project initiation and funding decisions).
- IT services remain aligned to business requirements.
- There is the requisite level of oversight and scrutiny.

It is inevitable that the call on IT Team resources to deliver what is an extensive and ambitious programme of work whilst maintain the existing infrastructure and services will exceed the available capacity. Our governance and principals will ensure that ALL IT programmes, project and work is co-ordinated, of value, strategically aligned and prioritised within the resource available.

[3] The power usage of the councils main Town Hall server room is c157,000Kw (c£60,000) per annum.

Resource Ownership

As we implement our strategy it is important that IT services are seen as a corporate resource. IT will therefore be responsible for the selection, procurement and management of IT resources including, but not limited to, laptops, monitors, mobile devices, applications, licences, etc. By taking a clear, corporate approach to IT resources we will avoid situations whereby they are underutilised or deployed less effectively than they could be.

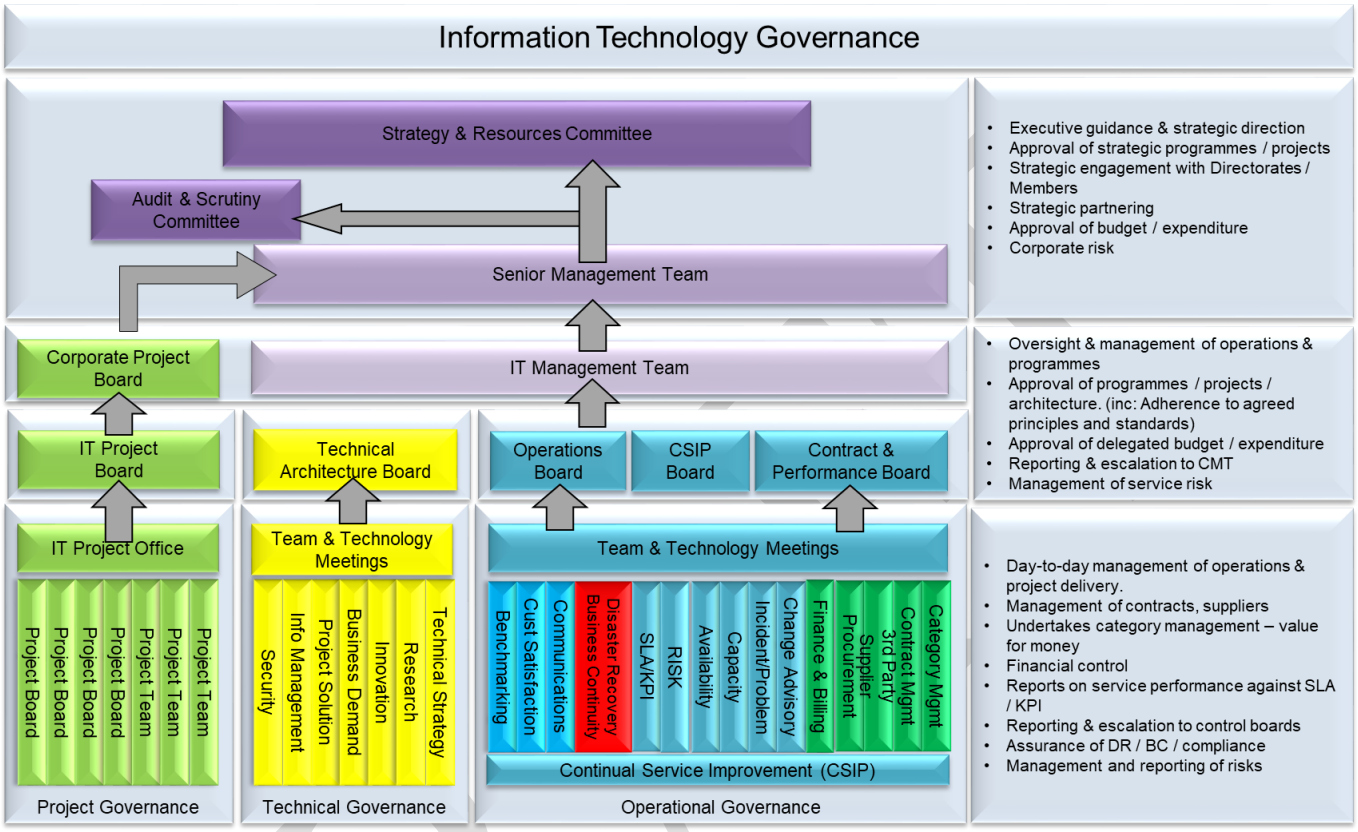

Figure 3: IT Service Governance

IT Service Quality & Standards

IT services will be delivered to appropriate standards using agreed methodologies to ensure compliance and quality criteria are met.

- ITIL – We will design and deliver services using the IT Infrastructure Library (ITIL) methodology.
- GCSx/PSN – We will connect to secure government services and in doing so we will ensure IT services are secure and comply with the required standards including the Code of Connection.
- PCI/DSS - Payment Card Industry Data Security Standard (PCI DSS) is an information security standard used to handle credit cards from major card brands.
- Project Management – We will deliver projects using project management methodologies appropriate to the size and type of project. Eg: Prince 2/Agile.

IT Services Collaboration & Shared Services

EEBC is a small council and as such has limited resources and few internal opportunities to benefit from economies of scale. To address this, IT Services will actively seek to learn from councils (and other relevant organisations) who have previously implemented services on our roadmap and not just "reinvent the wheel".

Where appropriate, we will collaborate and partner with others, thereby sharing resources, risks and costs. Whilst this may extend to joint procurements we do not envisage entering into any form of shared service arrangement.

The in-house IT Team, in conjunction with internal stakeholders, will be responsible for defining and delivering services. We will consider selective outsourcing of low-level services where it is most cost effective and efficient to do so. (eg: laptop build and deploy service).

Strategic Priorities

Based on the Maple IT Strategic Review we have identified the following strategic priorities.

Continued Service Stabilisation:

There are a number of areas where despite a recent and on-going programme of work the existing service offering falls short of business requirements. These areas will be reviewed and remediation implemented where, given the strategic roadmap and the current and/or future operational impact, it is considered cost-effective to do so.

End User Experience:

Feedback received both directly and through the IT Strategic Review highlights issues with the suitability, reliability and performance of the Citrix desktop service. The current thin-client based service does not support mobile working and to gain any form of mobility staff are generally required to use their own equipment. Further, the current service relies on aged, on-premise hardware and software which is (in part) end of life. Our IT Strategy will therefore be to replace the current desktop offering with corporate supplied and managed laptops. This will provide a vastly improved end user experience, true mobility and increased levels of security.

Infrastructure Services:

To benefit fully from the deployment of corporate laptops a number of areas of the current IT infrastructure need to be reengineered or replaced. A number of these are at or near end of life and already scheduled for upgrade or replacement. Undertaking this work now will be the most cost effective approach.

Data Services:

EEBC is currently in a hybrid state having moved some services and data into the Microsoft 365 Cloud environment. Whilst hybrid is an inevitable transition state, the work programme to complete the migration has stalled, in-part as a result of the significant resource required from within the organisation to cleanse and prepare data for migration. This programme of work is critical to the move to Cloud services and needs to be reinvigorated with all stakeholders committing fully to the work required.

CyberSecurity:

Work undertaken to date has seen the implementation of a hosted Security Information and Event Management (SIEM) service. This will be reviewed and a wider CyberSecurity programme initiated to take a holistic approach to protecting corporate systems and data. A key focus of this will be on user education.

Resident Services:

Delivery of public facing services is another area where some notable improvements have been achieved over the past few years but where the impetus has been lost. We will instigate a programme of work solely focussed on delivering improved, online, resident services. This will encompass both an upgrade and improvements to the corporate website and increasing the number

of online transactional services. We will engage with residents through citizens panels, surveys etc to ensure their views and needs are incorporated.

Other Services:

In addition to the strategic priorities there is a large and complex programme of business-as-usual upgrades and service improvements which need to be completed.