

Customer Service, IT and Digital Strategy 2026-2028

Making it easier to access council services

Ashford Borough Council is improving how residents and local businesses access services, information and support. Our Customer Service, IT and Digital Strategy sets out how we will make services simpler, clearer, more reliable and more inclusive, while still offering help for anyone who needs it.

Vision Statement

We will continue to build a digitally enabled council that puts residents, businesses and staff at the heart of every service. We will design digital journeys that are easy to navigate and accessible to all, supported by resilient systems and clear communication. By modernising our digital foundations, we will be prepared for Local Government Reorganisation in 2028.

Our design principles

All our services are built using clear digital design principles that keep customers at the centre of decisions and guide how we improve services across the council:

- Do the hard work, test and learn to keep it simple
- Focus on the customer journey
- Seamless approach
- Less is more
- Focus on the goals and delivery
- Who needs this information?
- Distinctive
- This is for everyone
- Tell customers what to expect and keep them up to date

What this means for you

We are focusing on five key areas that matter most to our customers. These reflect what residents, businesses and staff told us during consultation.



1. Get things done online – easily and reliably



You told us that you want to complete tasks quickly and without frustration, so we are improving our online services.

We will:

- Create clearer website content that's easier to navigate
- Build better online forms that don't ask for the same information twice
- Provide more reliable systems that work properly the first time
- Improve our search function to help you find the right information faster



Our aim is to make everyday tasks simple, whether you're reporting an issue, applying for a service or finding information.

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1. What residents want most



"The website should be easier to navigate."



"Sometimes you don't know which form you need."



"I just want to find the right thing quickly."



"Finding the correct page can be frustrating."



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2. Keep you informed at every step

You told us that knowing what's happening matters just as much as completing the task.



We will:

- Acknowledge your enquiry promptly
- Clearly explain what will happen next
- Tell you how long things are likely to take
- Improve updates and out of office messages so they're accurate and helpful



This will reduce uncertainty and make it easier to trust the process without needing to chase.



2. Online works — when it works well



"Online forms are easier than calling."



"It's convenient and there's a record of what I sent."



"I like being able to do things without waiting on the phone."



"The website works well for simple tasks."

3. Innovation & Future Services – with a human touch

We are exploring new technology, including automation and AI, where it genuinely improves customer experience.



What matters to us:

- Technology must be safe, responsible and well governed
- Human support will always be available when needed
- New services should save time, not create confusion



Innovation will help us prepare for the future while keeping services approachable and personal.



3. Keeping people informed really matters



"I didn't know what would happen next."



"I just want confirmation that my enquiry was received."



"Knowing when to expect a response would help."



"Lack of response is the most frustrating part."



4. Support, skills and inclusion for everyone

Not everyone can or wants to use digital services – and that’s okay.

We will:

- Keep phone and face-to-face support where it’s needed
- Improve guidance, help content and accessibility
- Write content in plain English and explain acronyms
- Explore tools like translation support to help more people access services



Our commitment is to make sure **no one is left behind** as services continue to change.



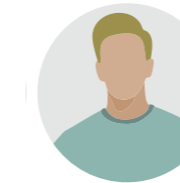
4. People still want human contact



“Sometimes you just need to speak to a person.”



“Automation shouldn’t block access to real help.”



“Phone contact really helps when things are complicated.”



“There should always be a way to reach a human.”

5. Reliable services you can trust

The feedback we received indicated that people want stable systems and a quick resolution when things go wrong.



We will:

- Improve system stability and resilience
- Protect your data and manage it safely
- Fix issues quickly when things go wrong
- Ensure services keep running smoothly



Reliable services mean fewer disruptions and a better experience for everyone.

Looking ahead

This strategy helps prepare Ashford Borough Council for future change, including Local Government Reorganisation, while continuing to improve everyday services now.

We will continue to listen to feedback and make improvements so services remain clear, reliable and accessible.

5. Views on automation and AI are mixed



"AI is fine for simple tasks."



"Technology should help, not get in the way."



"AI shouldn't replace proper customer service."

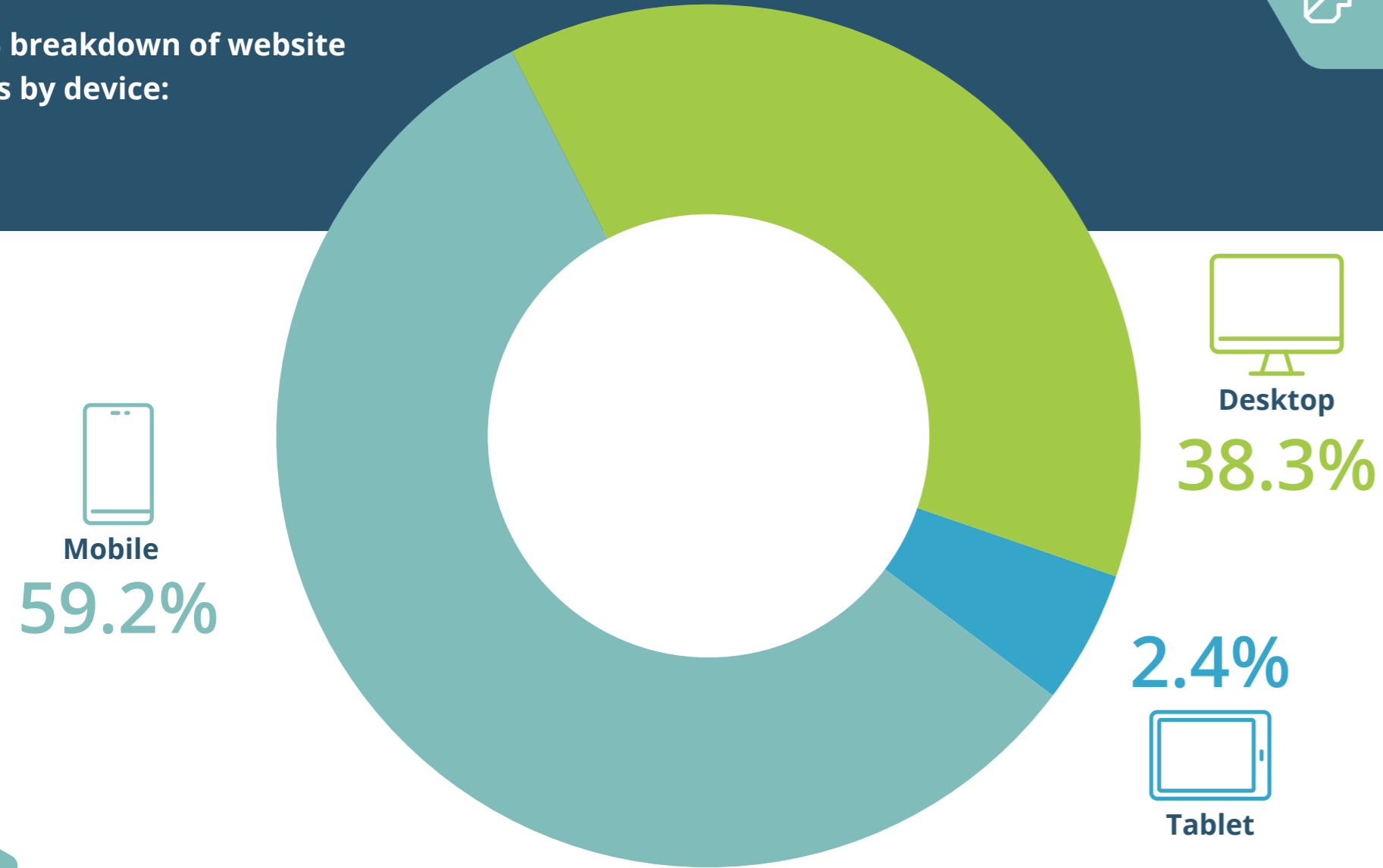


"I'm comfortable with AI as long as support is available."

Key Statistics



2025 breakdown of website visits by device:



Breakdown of 2025 customer service contacts:

