Data Strategy

Empowering Decisions for an Inclusive Future

2025 to 2030

1 Executive Summary

1.1 Oldham Council is poised to transform its data landscape, leveraging Microsoft technologies to deliver resident focused services whilst driving sustainability and innovation. This strategy outlines a 5 year plan (2025-2030) to evolve from fragmented data silos, with no central corporate home for data and analysts embedded in business units, to a unified, AI enhanced ecosystem using Microsoft Fabric, Co-pilot agents, Power BI, and automation tools. It aligns with the UK's National Data Strategy (NDS) and the Transforming for a Digital Future Roadmap (2022-2025), emphasising data driven public services for better productivity and resident engagement. This builds upon the ongoing discovery and transformation programme, which provides key deliverables like AI and Power BI applications for data insights, ensuring these outputs inform a council wide data framework without redundancy.

1.2 Key enablers include integration with Microsoft Azure for seamless back office connectivity, drawing on best practices in local government. The focus is on transforming services such as adults' and children's social care through predictive analytics, automated workflows, and real time insights, whilst prioritising ethical governance and digital inclusion. A key proposal is the creation of a centralised corporate data team within the Technology and Digital Service (TDS) to provide a dedicated home for data efforts, enhancing organisational impact by unifying expertise and fostering a data driven culture, as recommended in national surveys and guidance. The transformation programme outputs, such as benchmarking analyses and embedded dashboards, will be leveraged to build this framework, demonstrating value from the investment by informing demand management strategies.

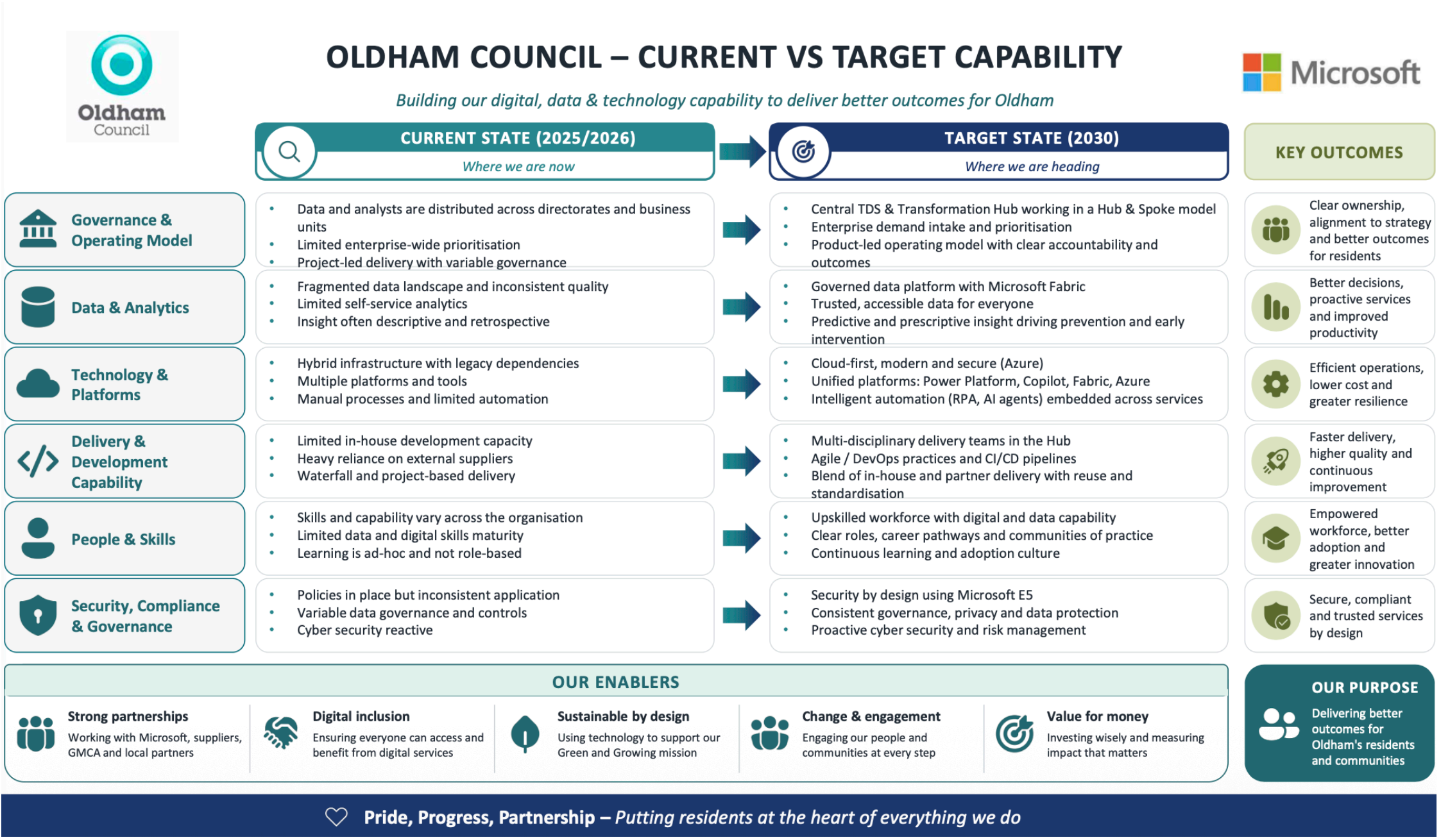
1.3 Expected outcomes include 20-30% efficiency gains, enhanced resident satisfaction, reduced costs through optimised resource allocation, and lower environmental impact via cloud based operations. This strategy centres the resident experience, fosters partnerships with local businesses in Greater Manchester, and demonstrates improved outcomes, and alignment with Oldham's Corporate Plan "Ready for the Future" (2024-27) and Borough Plan "Pride, Progress, Partnership," while maximising the transformation programme's contributions.

2 Introduction and Context

2.1 The public sector is under pressure to deliver efficient, accessible services amid rising demands, budget constraints, and technological advancements. According to the State of Digital Government Review (2025), outdated data systems hinder effective service delivery. For Oldham, the current Azure environment holds valuable data but lacks strong integration with back office systems, leading to silos that limit insights and efficiency. Additionally, data currently has no dedicated corporate home, with analysts dispersed across business units, resulting in inconsistent practices and reduced strategic impact, as highlighted in surveys on local government data capacity.

2.2 Figure 1 (reproduced from the Digital, Data and Technology Strategy) illustrates the current versus target capability position that this Data Strategy is designed to close. Of particular relevance are the shifts in Data & Analytics (from fragmented landscape and retrospective insight to a governed Microsoft Fabric platform with predictive and prescriptive insight) and Governance & Operating Model (from distributed analysts to a central TDS & Transformation Hub working in a Hub and Spoke model). These changes provide the foundation for the five data pillars that follow.

Figure 1: Focus on data and governance



2.3 This strategy addresses these challenges by building on the Digital, Data and Technology Strategy 2025-2030 (Pillar 3: Data Excellence) and the AI and Automation Policy, incorporating Microsoft Fabric for unified data management, Co-pilot agents for intelligent automation, Power BI for visualisation, and AI for advanced analytics. It draws inspiration from strategies in local government that emphasise data for decision making and service delivery, focussing on roles, processes, and technology for informed decisions. To overcome the decentralised structure, the strategy proposes establishing a centralised corporate data team within TDS, aligning with best practices where such teams integrate multidisciplinary skills to promote data use and measure impact. The diagnostic and transformation programme enhances this by delivering strengthened data approaches, including practical AI and Power BI applications, which will be used to construct a data framework that supports demand management and prevention investments.

2.4 In social care, AI and automation can revolutionise outcomes: predictive models for early interventions in children's safeguarding and automated care planning for adults. Challenges like data privacy (UK GDPR) and digital divides will be mitigated through inclusive programmes, aligning with the Gov.UK Digital Inclusion Action Plan (2025). By partnering with Microsoft and local entities via the Oldham Trading Platform, this strategy ensures Oldham leads in ethical data use, supporting regional goals like the Greater Manchester Digital Blueprint. Centralisation will place data at the organisation's core, enabling greater impact through coordinated efforts, as evidenced by approaches using data for efficiency and decision making. The transformation programme, targeting overspend in priority services, provides benchmarking and roadmaps that directly feed into this framework, ensuring the investment contributes to long term data maturity.

3 Vision and Mission

3.1 **Vision:** A data empowered Oldham where unified, ethical data drives inclusive growth, outstanding resident services, and proactive decision making.

3.2 **Mission:** To harness data as a strategic asset, integrating Microsoft technologies to transform council operations, empower the workforce, and deliver resident focused results, in line with national data strategies and local priorities.

3.3 This vision reflects best practices from the UK's National Data Strategy (e.g., designing data for reuse) and OECD's Good Practice Principles for Data Ethics in the Public Sector, tailored to Oldham's context for maximum impact, and informed by outputs from the transformation programme.

4 Guiding Principles

4.1 Informed by UK government guidelines, consultancy insights (e.g., Deloitte's Data and Digital Transformation), and strategies in local government:

4.1.1 Resident Focused, Ethical Data Use: Prioritise resident needs with accessible, bias free insights, ensuring digital inclusion per Gov.UK's Action Plan.

4.1.2 Unified and Governed Data: Treat data as an asset with strong governance, following Microsoft Fabric's compliance tools.

4.1.3 Secure and Compliant: Embed security (zero trust models) and privacy, aligning with the AI and Automation Policy's sensitive data principles.

4.1.4 Innovative and Agile: Adopt AI responsibly, with human oversight, drawing from Gartner's trends on AI in public sector.

4.1.5 Collaborative and Inclusive: Partner with stakeholders for shared value, building workforce skills via Greater Manchester programmes.

4.1.6 Sustainable and Outcome Focused: Promote green data practices to support the Green and Growing mission.

These principles ensure ethical, balanced advancement, with centralisation enhancing governance and collaboration, supported by the transformation programme’s co-design model and data deliverables.

5 Strategic Pillars and Objectives

Built on five pillars, incorporating Microsoft stack and best practices from local government, leveraging the transformation programme outputs for benchmarking and insights.

5.1 Pillar 1 - **Data Infrastructure and Unification**

5.1.1 Objectives: Achieve seamless integration using Microsoft Fabric, building on transformation programme's diagnostic analyses.

5.1.2 Projects: Assess current Azure silos; Migrate and unify data lakes; Optimise with Fabric governance.

5.1.3 Resident Focus: Enables personalised services.

5.1.4 Link to Plans: Supports ambition through modernisation.

5.1.5 KPIs: 100% data integration; 15% cost reduction.

Category	**Current State**	**Target State (2030)**	**Tools/Influences**
Data Sources	Siloed Azure	Unified Fabric	Azure Synapse, Fabric; transformation benchmarking
Back Office Link	Limited	Real time	APIs, Fabric Pipelines; programme roadmaps
Storage (TB)	158	Scalable Cloud	Azure + Fabric; demand insights from transformation

5.2 Pillar 2 - **AI and Automation Integration**

5.2.1 Objectives: Deploy Co-pilot agents and AI for insights, informed by the transformation AI applications.

5.2.2 Projects: Pilot AI in social care; Rollout agents for automation; Full integration.

5.2.3 Resident Focus: Predictive care in adults/children's services.

5.2.4 Link: Enhances Healthier, Happier Lives.

5.2.5 KPIs: 25% admin reduction; improved intervention rates.

Service	**AI Application**	**Expected Impact**	**Transformation Contribution**
Children's Social Care	Predictive Risk Models	20% earlier interventions	Demand driver analysis
Adults' Social Care	Automated Care Plans	15% efficiency gains	Overspend control strategies
General	Co-pilot Agents	Real time queries	AI for decision making

5.3 Pillar 3 - **Analytics and Visualisation Excellence**

5.3.1 Objectives: Empower decisions with Power BI, using transformation embedded dashboards.

5.3.2 Projects: Build dashboards; AI enhanced predictions.

5.3.3 Resident Focus: Transparent, data led services.

5.3.4 Link: Data led prevention in Corporate Plan.

5.3.5 KPIs: 80% dashboard adoption; better accuracy.

5.4 Pillar 4 - **Governance and Ethics**

5.4.1 Objectives: Ensure compliant, bias free data use.

5.4.2 Projects: DPIA for AI projects; Ethical frameworks.

5.4.3 Resident Focus: Builds trust.

5.4.4 Link: Aligns with AI Policy.

5.4.5 KPIs: 100% compliance; annual audits.

Centralised governance will be strengthened through the proposed corporate data team, drawing on the Gov.uk Data Ethics Framework and transformation recommendations for corporate reshaping.

5.5 Pillar 5 - **Workforce and Partnership Empowerment**

5.5.1 Objectives: Upskill staff and collaborate, including centralising data expertise.

5.5.2 Projects: Establish corporate data team in TDS; Training programmes; and best practice adoption, Local partnerships.

5.5.3 Resident Focus: Better services through skilled, centralised teams.

5.5.4 Link: Together value.

5.5.5 KPIs: 90% trained; 5 new initiatives; fully operational central team.

This pillar directly addresses the current decentralised structure by creating a centralised team, integrating with TDS for technical support and business units via data champions, as per best practices in national guides and reports, and empowered by the transformation programme's co-design model.

6 Implementation Roadmap

6.1 **Foundation:** Assessments, pilots in social care, Fabric setup; Establish centralised corporate data team within TDS, including recruitment and business case development; Integrate initial transformation programme outputs like benchmarking.

6.2 **Scale:** Full migrations, AI deployments; Integrate team with business units through governance boards; Incorporate the transformation roadmaps and dashboards.

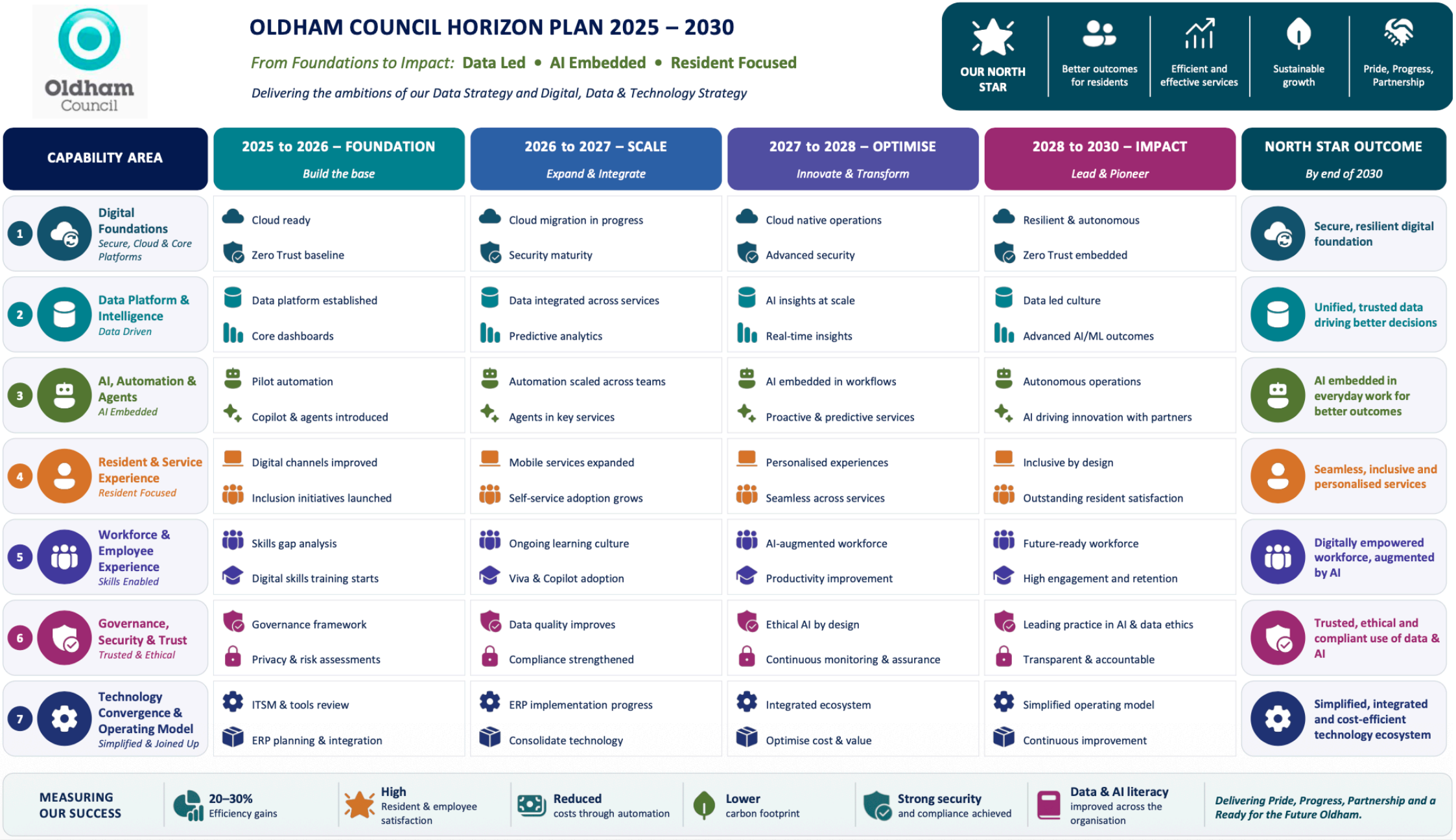
6.3 **Optimise:** Evaluations, optimisations; Mature team operations for continuous improvement; Leverage full transformation deliverables for framework refinement.

6.4 **Impact:** Embed a fully data led culture with advanced AI/ML outcomes delivering proactive and personalised services; the central corporate data team operates at full maturity, driving continuous improvement, innovation with partners and measurable impact on resident outcomes; maximise sustained value from all transformation programme deliverables.

6.5 **North Star Outcome (by end of 2030):** A unified, trusted data platform and data led culture that drives better decisions, earlier interventions (especially in adults' and children's social care), higher productivity and outstanding resident services, with AI embedded in everyday work, strong ethical governance and a skilled, empowered workforce. This realises the shared ambitions of both this Data Strategy and the Digital, Data and Technology Strategy.

6.6 Figure 2 shows the shared Horizon Plan that delivers both this Data Strategy and the wider Digital, Data and Technology Strategy. Capability Area 2 (Data Platform & Intelligence) and Capability Area 3 (AI, Automation & Agents) are of particular importance. They chart the journey from establishing a data platform and core dashboards, through integration and predictive analytics, to a fully data led culture with advanced AI / Machine Learning outcomes by 2030. The central corporate data team proposed in this strategy is a key enabler of the Foundation and Scale phases.

Figure 2:


Oldham Council
OLDHAM COUNCIL HORIZON PLAN 2025 – 2030
From Foundations to Impact: Data Led • AI Embedded • Resident Focused
Delivering the ambitions of our Data Strategy and Digital, Data & Technology Strategy
OUR NORTH STAR
Better outcomes for residents
Efficient and effective services
Sustainable growth
Pride, Progress, Partnership
CAPABILITY AREA
2025 to 2026 – FOUNDATION
Build the base
2026 to 2027 – SCALE
Expand & Integrate
2027 to 2028 – OPTIMISE
Innovate & Transform
2028 to 2030 – IMPACT
Lead & Pioneer
NORTH STAR OUTCOME
By end of 2030
1 Digital Foundations
Secure, Cloud & Core Platforms
Cloud ready
Zero Trust baseline
Cloud migration in progress
Security maturity
Cloud native operations
Advanced security
Resilient & autonomous
Zero Trust embedded
Secure, resilient digital foundation
2 Data Platform & Intelligence
Data Driven
Data platform established
Core dashboards
Data integrated across services
Predictive analytics
AI insights at scale
Real-time insights
Data led culture
Advanced AI/ML outcomes
Unified, trusted data driving better decisions
3 AI, Automation & Agents
AI Embedded
Pilot automation
Copilot & agents introduced
Automation scaled across teams
Agents in key services
AI embedded in workflows
Proactive & predictive services
Autonomous operations
AI driving innovation with partners
AI embedded in everyday work for better outcomes
4 Resident & Service Experience
Resident Focused
Digital channels improved
Inclusion initiatives launched
Mobile services expanded
Self-service adoption grows
Personalised experiences
Seamless across services
Inclusive by design
Outstanding resident satisfaction
Seamless, inclusive and personalised services
5 Workforce & Employee Experience
Skills Enabled
Skills gap analysis
Digital skills training starts
Ongoing learning culture
Viva & Copilot adoption
AI-augmented workforce
Productivity improvement
Future-ready workforce
High engagement and retention
Digitally empowered workforce, augmented by AI
6 Governance, Security & Trust
Trusted & Ethical
Governance framework
Privacy & risk assessments
Data quality improves
Compliance strengthened
Ethical AI by design
Continuous monitoring & assurance
Leading practice in AI & data ethics
Transparent & accountable
Trusted, ethical and compliant use of data & AI
7 Technology Convergence & Operating Model
Simplified & Joined Up
ITSM & tools review
ERP planning & integration
ERP implementation progress
Consolidate technology
Integrated ecosystem
Optimise cost & value
Simplified operating model
Continuous improvement
Simplified, integrated and cost-efficient technology ecosystem
MEASURING OUR SUCCESS
20–30% Efficiency gains
High Resident & employee satisfaction
Reduced costs through automation
Lower carbon footprint
Strong security and compliance achieved
Data & AI literacy improved across the organisation
Delivering Pride, Progress, Partnership and a Ready for the Future Oldham.

7 Governance and Measurement

7.1 Overseen by Digital Transformation & Design Assurance Group, with ethical reviews per AI Playbook (2025). Metrics: KPIs, ROI, resident feedback. The centralised team will lead on data maturity assessments, using tools like the Government Data Quality Framework, informed by transformation benchmarking.

7.2 Ties to operational impacts for accountability, with annual reviews of team effectiveness, evaluating integration of programme outputs.

8 Challenges and Mitigation

8.1 Data silos and decentralised analysts: Mitigated by Fabric unification and central team creation, supported by the transformation programme's diagnostic insights.

8.2 Data Quality and Integrity: Ensuring data accuracy, consistency, and reliability is crucial. Implementing data quality frameworks and regular audits to maintain high standards.

8.3 Privacy risks: Addressed via Purview and DPIAs.

8.4 Skills gaps and resistance to change: Through training, communication, and federated models.

8.5 Financial and legacy system barriers: Tackled via business cases and phased investment, per national recommendations, with transformation business cases providing templates.

8.6 Turn challenges into opportunities for resilience, ensuring the central team drives cultural shift, maximising value from the transformation programme.

9 References

I. UK National Data Strategy (GOV.UK).
II. OECD Good Practice Principles for Data Ethics in the Public Sector.
III. Microsoft Fabric Governance Overview.
IV. AI in Adult Social Care Case Studies (NHS England).
V. Deloitte Data and Digital Transformation Insights.
VI. Gartner AI Trends in Public Sector.
VII. Gov.UK Digital Inclusion Action Plan (2025).
VIII. Greater Manchester Digital Blueprint.
IX. Oldham Council AI and Automation Policy.
X. Oldham Digital, Data and Technology Strategy 2025-2030.
XI. Azure Cloud Contract Report (2025).
XII. Gov.uk Data Ethics Framework.
XIII. Local Government Association (LGA) Data Capacity Survey (2025).
XIV. National Audit Office (NAO) Improving Government Data Guide (2022).
XV. IPPO Delivering Data Led Local Policy Report (2024).
XVI. Oldham Council Diagnostic and Transformation Programme Contract Award (June 2025).