Comhairle Chontae Chill Chainnigh
Kilkenny County Council

**Kilkenny County Council**

# DIGITAL STRATEGY

2025 – 2027

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

# FOREWORD



**CLLR MICHAEL MCCARTHY**
Cathaoirleach

As we look toward the future, Kilkenny County Council is committed to ensuring that our county is prepared to embrace the vast opportunities offered by digital transformation. Digital technologies are reshaping the way we live, work, and engage with each other, and our community must be equipped with the infrastructure, skills, and services necessary to thrive in a rapidly evolving digital landscape.

Kilkenny County Council's Digital Strategy 2025-2027 is a key element of our broader vision for a connected and empowered Kilkenny. This strategy highlights our role in supporting local government, businesses, and citizens in harnessing the full potential of digital innovation for our citizens.

We are proud to be working in line with National and European digital policies and strategies, ensuring that Kilkenny remains competitive on a global scale while maintaining the unique qualities that make our county an exceptional place to live and work. The actions outlined in this strategy will not only improve service delivery and access for our citizens but will also create new opportunities for businesses, increase social inclusion, and support sustainable growth across the county.

This strategy represents Kilkenny County Council's ongoing commitment to positioning the county as a leader in digital development. Through working in collaboration at national and local level, we will create a future where every citizen, business, and public service can fully benefit from the digital revolution.

We extend our thanks to the many partners and stakeholders who contributed to the development of this strategy, and we look forward to the positive outcomes that will emerge as we implement the digital initiatives outlined within this strategy.

# INTRODUCTION

Kilkenny County Council's (KCC) Digital Strategy 2025 – 2027 is focused on supporting County Kilkenny citizens and businesses through digital transformation to ensure every person can fully participate in the digital age.

The strategy has a key vision: To provide the environment for a connected, inclusive, sustainable, and future-ready County Kilkenny.

Four key pillars will collectively drive County Kilkenny's digital progress:

- **Digital Infrastructure**: Facilitate broadband access and digital infrastructure that enables connectivity across the county.
- **Digital Skills and Inclusion**: Assist in empowering citizens to fully engage with digital opportunities and improve digital literacy skills.
- **Digital Transformation of Business**: Support Kilkenny's business with access to digital tools, training, and services that enhance competitiveness.
- **Digitalisation of Public Services**: Ensure that services are accessible, efficient, and user-friendly for all.

This strategy is rooted in collaboration with stakeholders, including the Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD), elected members, local businesses, community organisations, libraries, and citizens. By aligning with European, National, and Local digital agendas, KCC ensures that its efforts integrate with broader frameworks while addressing the unique needs of the local community.

Through this strategy, KCC aims to enhance quality of life, drive economic growth, support climate action, and promote sustainability, ensuring that Kilkenny continues to be a vibrant, forward-looking county at the heart of Ireland's digital transformation.

# RESEARCH PROCESS & FINDINGS

To ensure the strategy meets the evolving needs of County Kilkenny, KCC undertook a two-phase research process comprising a Digital Audit and Stakeholder Consultation. This research focused on evaluating digital services, understanding citizen needs, and identifying opportunities for innovation and inclusivity. The findings provide a foundation for sustainable, user-focused digital transformation, with a detailed report in the Appendix.

## Digital Audit & Citizen Customer Journeys

The Digital Audit involved an evaluation of KCC's digital infrastructure, processes, and services, comprising three key components:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | **Stakeholder Interviews** | KCC staff from key service areas were interviewed to understand internal workflows and identify both challenges and opportunities. |
| | **Technical Website Audit** | Key pages of the KCC website were reviewed to assess navigation, content structure, and usability. |
| | **Customer Journey Mapping** | High-demand services frequently accessed by citizens were identified through staff discussions. The end-to-end steps of these services were then manually mapped to capture the full citizen experience. |

## Key Stakeholders Consultations

Engaging stakeholders was also central to the research, ensuring diverse perspectives were incorporated into the strategy. This was carried out in three parts:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | **Online Survey** | Citizens were invited to participate in a digital survey on consult.kilkenny.ie, sharing their views on accessibility, skills development, and service delivery priorities. |
| | **Stakeholder Interviews** | Discussions with KCC staff from various service areas, as well as local stakeholders, provided insights into challenges, opportunities, and broader initiatives. |
| | **In-Person Forums** | Two focus groups were conducted to gain detailed feedback from 1) community representatives and 2) business representatives. |

# RESEARCH PROCESS & FINDINGS

## Overall Findings

The research highlighted key opportunities and challenges across digital service delivery, accessibility, community engagement, and internal operations, forming the foundation for actionable improvements in KCC's digital transformation efforts.

| FINDINGS | DESCRIPTION |
| --- | --- |
| Digital Gaps | Opportunities were identified to modernise processes, enhance accessibility, and integrate digital tools across key services. |
| Community Feedback | Citizens expressed interest in greater accessibility, enhanced digital skills, and more efficient online services. |
| Operational Insights | Internal feedback revealed opportunities to improve workflows and provide staff with additional training and resources. |

# STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT

The successful implementation of KCC's Digital Strategy 2025 - 2027 is rooted in its alignment with key European, National, and Local policies. These policy frameworks guide KCC's efforts to assist County Kilkenny's digital transformation. This section provides an overview of the relevant policies that informed the strategy's creation, including an overview of each framework and its relevant objectives to the strategy, summarised.

## European Frameworks

### EU DIGITAL DECADE 2030[1]

Developed by the European Commission, this framework aims to drive Europe's digital transformation by focusing on skills, sustainable digital infrastructure, businesses, and public services to ensure inclusivity and technological sovereignty.

**Relevant Summarised Objectives**

100% of key public services online

90% of SMEs reach at least basic level of digital intensity

80% of population with basic digital skills

75% of companies using Cloud, AI, or Big Data

Gigabit connectivity for everyone

### WIFI4EU[2]

A programme by the European Commission, it aims to provide free, high-quality Wi-Fi in public spaces across Europe, promoting digital inclusion and connectivity.

**Relevant Summarised Objectives**

Free public Wi-Fi access in public spaces

# STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT

**National Frameworks**

## CLIMATE ACTION PLAN[3]

Developed by Ireland's Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications, this plan focuses on reducing emissions, promoting renewable energy, and advancing sustainability.

**Relevant Summarised Objectives**

Adopt digital tools for tracking and reporting
on local climate action plans

Promote climate literacy through digital platforms
and education initiatives

Leverage smart technologies to improve energy
efficiency and sustainability

Develop data systems to measure climate action
outcomes and inform decisions

Provide centralised training to enhance public
sector climate and digital competencies

## CONNECTING GOVERNMENT 2030[4]

Created by Ireland's Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, this digital and ICT strategy focuses on modernising public services through secure, seamless, and inclusive digital transformation.

**Relevant Summarised Objectives**

90% of public services available online by 2030

Implement proactive, end-to-end services using the once-only
principle

Expand common platforms like MyGovID and gov.ie

# STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT

## DIGITAL LOCAL GOVERNMENT: WORKING FOR EVERYONE [5]

This plan, developed by Local Government Ireland, provides a roadmap for Local Authorities to enhance public services, support community well-being, and drive economic development through technology.

**Relevant Summarised Objectives**

Streamline access to digital services for citizens

Ensure inclusive access, connectivity, and support to communities

Equip staff with the tools and skills to deliver better services

Leverage advanced technologies to improve efficiency and resilience

## HARNESSING DIGITAL: THE DIGITAL IRELAND FRAMEWORK [6]

A strategy by the Government of Ireland to advance digital infrastructure, transform public services, and boost digital skills and business innovation while aligning with global trends.

**Relevant Summarised Objectives**

Broadband coverage for all households and businesses by 2028

All populated areas covered by 5G no later than 2030

90% of SMEs with basic digital intensity

90% of public services available online by 2030

75% adopting advanced technologies like AI and cloud computing

## NATIONAL BROADBAND PLAN [7]

National Broadband Ireland has a goal of delivering high-speed fibre broadband to all houses and businesses within the specified deployment areas.

**Relevant Summarised Objectives**

Deliver high-speed broadband to all premises in the identified deployment areas, particularly rural areas.

# STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT

## REGIONAL SPATIAL & ECONOMIC STRATEGY [8]

Created by the Southern Regional Assembly, this framework provides a long-term strategic plan for the physical, economic, and social development of the Southern Region.

**Relevant Summarised Objectives**

Combat climate change

Achieve economic prosperity and improved quality of life

Accommodate expanded growth and development

Make the Southern Region one of Europe's most creative, innovative, greenest, and liveable regions

## Local Frameworks

## KILKENNY COUNTY COUNCIL CORPORATE PLAN 2024 – 2029 [9]

This plan sets the strategic direction for KCC's actions over the next five years, providing a framework for service delivery, citizen engagement, and partnership with stakeholders.

**Relevant Summarised Objectives**

Enhance digital infrastructure to improve service delivery and operational efficiency

Promote inclusivity and accessibility in digital services

Leverage digital tools to support sustainability and economic development

Strengthen digital resilience, cybersecurity, and data governance

Invest in digital skills and partnerships to foster innovation and community engagement

# STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT

## KILKENNY CITY AND COUNTY DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2021 – 2027 [10]

Outlining Kilkenny's strategic vision for sustainable development across the city and county, the plan aligns local planning policies with National frameworks such as the National Planning Framework and Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies.

**Relevant Summarised Objectives**

Support the rollout of high-speed broadband to all areas in alignment with the National Broadband Plan

Promote the development of co-working hubs and innovation spaces to enable remote working

Advance critical digital infrastructure to underpin smart city initiatives and public services

Ensure digital tools and services align with sustainable urban planning principles

Prioritise digital education and inclusion initiatives to bridge the digital divide
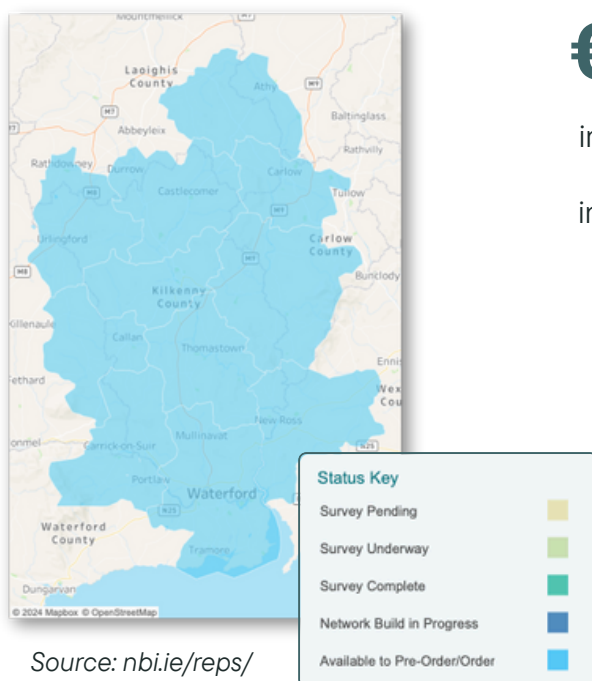
# DIGITAL READINESS OF COUNTY KILKENNY

The KCC Digital Strategy 2025–2027 builds on a strong foundation of existing progress by National, Regional, and Local initiatives. The updates below highlight key goals and targets from relevant National and Regional initiatives that align with and support this strategy's objectives. These updates are not exhaustive of the initiatives' full scope but focus on areas most pertinent to KCC's digital transformation efforts.

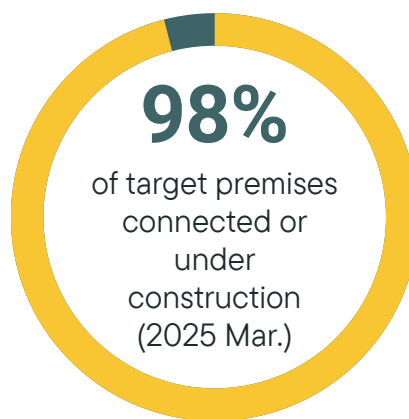## Broadband Coverage[11] and Connectivity



Source: nbi.ie/reps/

**Status Key**
- Survey Pending
- Survey Underway
- Survey Complete
- Network Build in Progress
- Available to Pre-Order/Order

**€72M**

investment in fibre-optic infrastructure

**7,186**

premises to receive high-speed broadband connections

**98%**

of target premises connected or under construction (2025 Mar.)

·Implementation of WiFi4EU in key public spaces, including Kilkenny City, Callan, Thomastown, Castlecomer, Urlingford, and Graiguenamanagh.

## Digital Skills Development

- Community feedback suggests gaps in digital skills for vulnerable groups (see Appendix).

- Libraries provide free access to digital resources, training workshops, and digital device loans.
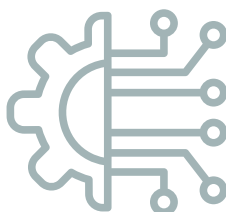
- KCETB delivers digital literacy programmes tailored to various skill levels.

- High interest in artificial intelligence (AI), digital marketing, and data analytics.

# DIGITAL READINESS OF COUNTY KILKENNY

## Digitalisation of Business

SMEs meet minimum global standards, such as websites and card payment systems.

DRCD helps fund digital hubs, fostering rural entrepreneurship.

Local Enterprise Office provides training, mentoring, and workshops for businesses.

KCETB enhances workforce skills with targeted training programmes for employees.
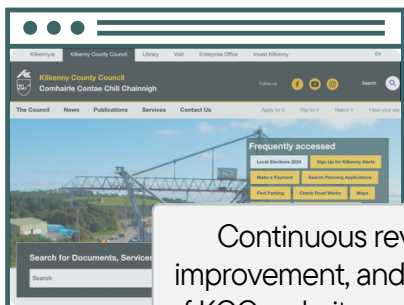
## Digital Public Services

Apply for it  >        Pay for it  >

Progress in online services offered on KCC website, such as digital applications and payments.

Continuous review, improvement, and update of KCC websites, platforms, and services.

## Climate Action and Sustainability

- ·Monitoring and reporting progress on energy efficiency and greenhouse gas reduction targets.

- ·Conducting assessments of digital infrastructure to identify energy-saving opportunities.

- ·Supporting digital hubs to reduce commuting emissions and promote remote working.

- ·Implementing green public procurement policies for ICT assets to minimise environmental impact.

# DIGITAL READINESS OF COUNTY KILKENNY

**County Kilkenny SWOT Analysis**

To shape County Kilkenny's digital transformation, this SWOT analysis evaluates key strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats within the county's digital ecosystem. By identifying actionable insights, the analysis highlights opportunities to foster innovation, inclusivity, and resilience while addressing critical challenges.

## S

### Strengths

- Alignment with National digital frameworks
- Commitment to digital innovation and inclusivity
- Established foundation of digital assets and infrastructure
- Proactive stakeholder engagement and public consultation
- Progress toward National, Regional, and Local digital transformation goals

## W

### Weaknesses

- Digital skills among businesses and citizens
- Fragmented system integration at Local level
- Fragmented citizen experience from Local to National level
- Consistency in digital service delivery
- Resource constraints
- Energy demands of IT systems

## O

### Opportunities

- Engaging communities further
- National initiatives providing infrastructure upgrades
- Advanced website systems integration
- Emerging and new technologies
- Data utilisation and decision-making
- Climate-driven initiatives and upgrades
- Updating/simplifying current digital resources and processes
- Enhancing citizen knowledge and engagement

## T

### Threats

- Cost of digital adoption
- Cybersecurity vulnerabilities
- Rapid technological changes
- Resistance to digital transformation
- Limited digital literacy for certain communities
- Climate Risk

# KEY PILLARS

The Key Pillars of the KCC Digital Strategy serve as the foundation for supporting a digitally inclusive, efficient, and connected County Kilkenny. These pillars address the core areas of digital transformation by leveraging national and regional initiatives, local partnerships, and citizen feedback to guide actionable strategies.

Each pillar represents a targeted focus area, addressing critical aspects of KCC's role:

- **Pillar 1: Digital Infrastructure** supports access to high-speed broadband and digital infrastructure to lay the groundwork for connectivity across the county.
- **Pillar 2: Digital Skills and Inclusion** supports the development of citizen digital literacy and aims to reduce barriers to digital access, particularly for vulnerable groups.
- **Pillar 3: Digital Transformation of Business** encourages enterprises to thrive in the digital economy by promoting digital tools and resources.
- **Pillar 4: Digitalisation of Public Services** streamlines service delivery and enhances citizens' digital experience when interacting with KCC.

This section provides an overview of each pillar, summarising the associated research, relevant initiatives, and specific actions.

## Pillar 1: Digital Infrastructure

This pillar focuses on supporting the continued rollout of high-speed broadband and digital infrastructure across County Kilkenny. KCC will continue working in partnership with national initiatives to support a digitally inclusive future. This section will provide an overview of relevant national and regional initiatives and detail KCC's facilitative actions to assist these initiatives.

### *Smart City Development*

The National Planning Framework[12] and Project Ireland 2040[13] both advocate for integrating smart technologies into urban planning as part of a broader goal to create sustainable, digitally connected cities and communities. Other National plans, including the Digital Ireland Framework[6] and the Climate Action Plan[3], also highlight digital innovation as a means of transitioning Ireland to a low carbon, connected society that benefits all communities.

Further, the Southern Regional Assembly's Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy[8] (RSES) underscores the importance of digital infrastructure and smart technologies. The RSES envisions a Smart Region that utilises digital infrastructure to enable sustainable development, promote digital inclusion, and attract investment.

# KEY PILLARS – PILLAR 1

These initiatives are in support of a "Smart City" concept, which refers to an urban area that leverages technology and data to enhance public services, improve efficiency, and create sustainable, liveable spaces for residents. Smart City Development integrates digital solutions — such as high-speed internet, smart sensors, data analytics, and citizen engagement platforms — to optimise city functions and enhance quality of life. Key components of Smart City initiatives typically include intelligent transportation systems that reduce traffic congestion, energy-efficient public lighting, smart environmental monitoring, and digital services that streamline interactions between citizens and local authorities.

## *National Broadband Plan (NBP) & Broadband Infrastructure*

The NBP is an initiative aimed at providing high-speed broadband into over 600,000 premises to specified areas across Ireland. Managed by National Broadband Ireland, the NBP guarantees a minimum download speed of 500 Mbps to enhance connectivity for both residential and business users. Representing the largest infrastructure project in rural Ireland since rural electrification, the NBP covers 96% of Ireland's land mass and reaches 23% of its population, including 69% of all farms.

Significant progress has been made, with over 564,000 premises surveyed and 337,440 premises across 26 counties now able to order or pre-order high-speed broadband services as of March 2025. The project involves laying 140,000 km of fibre cable, utilising over 1.5 million poles and 15,000 km of underground ducts .[7]

Roll Out of the NBP Across County Kilkenny
With a government investment of €72 million dedicated to enhancing broadband infrastructure within the deployment areas of County Kilkenny , substantial progress has been[14] achieved in connecting the 18,326 premises to high-speed broadband. As of March 2025, the premises' status is as follows: [11]

- Network Built and Available to Order/Pre-Order: 18,324 premises (98%)
- Network Build in Progress: 321 premises (2%)
- Active Connections: 7,186 premises

Broadband Connection Points (BCPs)
To address immediate connectivity needs in rural areas, the NBP established BCPs throughout County Kilkenny. These BCPs serve as interim high-speed internet hubs, offering local communities access to broadband until full fibre deployment reaches their areas.

# KEY PILLARS – PILLAR 1

Currently, County Kilkenny hosts eight BCPs, located in the following venues:

- Ballyouskill Community Hall
- Connollys Pub, Dunbell
- Crosspatrick Community Hall
- Galmoy Community Centre
- Glenmore Community Hall
- Graine Community Hall
- Muckalee Community Centre
- Tullahought Parish Hall

As fibre broadband has expanded into many areas of County Kilkenny, the role of the BCPs will evolve, leading to reduced usage in regions with direct fibre connectivity. This shift necessitates a reassessment of the BCPs' purpose. The DRCD — which co-funded the fibre infrastructure for these BCPs — is reviewing their future strategy via the National Hub Network Strategy 2024 - 2027, expected in quarter two of 2025. It will provide a clearer strategic direction for the future use of these facilities.

The three pillars within the scope of the National Hub Network Strategy 2024 – 2027 are:

| PILLAR | DESCRIPTION |
|---|---|
| Digital Communities | Enabling delivery of digital services in the community utilising broadband connectivity made available by BCP's in rural communities, including offshore islands, with a focus on key measures for the next three years:<br>• Review the capacity and capabilities of the current BCP's to deliver on the communities' long-term ambitions.<br>• Maintain the current funding of telecoms infrastructure and service provider costs of BCPs.<br>• Continue to co-fund the Broadband Officer role with the Local Authorities. |
| Hub Working Services | Providing flexible professional working spaces, meeting rooms and event space to accommodate employees and businesses with hybrid or remote working arrangements. |
| Enterprise Development | Using Enterprise hubs to provide physical space and programmatic support for entrepreneurs nascent businesses to start and grow. The diverse support services range from mentoring and peer networks to technology solutions. |

# KEY PILLARS – PILLAR 1

Metropolitan Area Networks (MANs)

Located within the NBP's deployment areas, County Kilkenny's MANs complement the NBPs efforts, providing additional high-speed fibre optic connectivity in Kilkenny City and Thomastown. Operated by Ireland's largest open access network provider, Enet, these state-funded fibre networks deliver virtually unlimited bandwidth and operate on an open-access basis. The MANs support a wide range of public services, businesses, and community initiatives, laying a strong foundation for Smart City Development and positioning Kilkenny as a digitally ready location for future investment.

*County Kilkenny's Connectivity Outside the NBP*

While the NBP focuses on delivering high-speed broadband to County Kilkenny's underserved areas, other connectivity initiatives help ensure that all communities in County Kilkenny have access to digital services. KCC plays a key facilitative role in supporting these initiatives, including the Ireland Fibre Network (IFN) Scheme, Connected Hubs, and the WiFi4EU programme.

OpenEir Ireland Fibre Network (IFN) Scheme

Further complementing the NBP rollout, OpenEir's IFN Scheme provides fibre-to-the-home broadband with speeds up to 10 Gbps. Targeting areas outside the NBP's deployment areas, the IFN focuses on towns and villages with over 1,000 premises, ensuring that businesses and households in these areas also benefit from connectivity. This initiative builds upon OpenEir's previous investments, expanding access to high-speed broadband in both urban and rural locations. Key deployment areas under the IFN Scheme in Kilkenny include:

- Bennettsbridge
- Callan
- Castlecomer
- Graiguenamanagh
- Thomastown
- Urlingford

Remote Working and Connected Hubs

To assist remote working and flexible employment options, a network of Remote Working and Connected Hubs, listed below, can be found across County Kilkenny. These hubs provide remote workers, freelancers, and small business owners with the option of dedicated workspaces, reliable internet access, and resources that can enhance productivity and work-life balance.

# KEY PILLARS – PILLAR 1

Key locations across the County include:

| Connected Hubs | Community Facilities | Private Facilities |
|---|---|---|
| *Ballyouskill Community Hall | Exit 4 Urlingford Remote | New Work Junction |
| *Connolly's Pub, Dunbell | Working Hub | Pembroke Business Centre |
| *Galmoy Community Centre | *Glenmore Community Centre | We Do Work Spaces |
| *Muckalee Community Centre | Market House Hub, Piltown | |

*Also a BCP location.

WiFi4EU

The WiFi4EU programme has introduced free public Wi-Fi access across several locations in County Kilkenny. Supported by the European Union, WiFi4EU is an initiative aimed at bridging the digital divide by providing free Wi-Fi in public areas where citizens and visitors can connect to essential online services. County Kilkenny has leveraged this programme to set up Wi-Fi access points in Kilkenny City, Callan, Graiguenamanagh, Castlecomer, Thomastown, and Urlingford.

The map to the right illustrates the extensive digital infrastructure initiatives across County Kilkenny, including key MANs, BCPs, WiFi4EU locations, and Remote Hubs. These locations, referred to as connectivity stakeholders throughout this strategy, position County Kilkenny as a digitally empowered county ready to embrace future opportunities in business, community development, and smart city innovation.
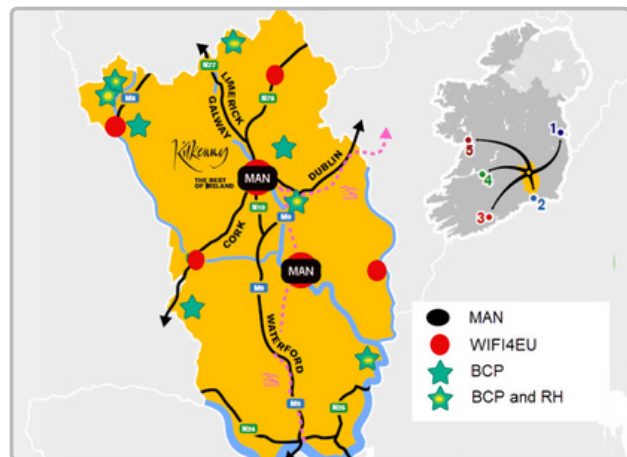


*Source: Kilkenny County Council*

# KEY PILLARS – PILLAR 1

*Actions: Facilitating Digital Infrastructure*

To support the continued development of County Kilkenny's digital infrastructure, KCC formed actions that will focus on facilitating high-speed broadband rollout, optimising connectivity resources, and laying the groundwork for future Smart City initiatives. KCC plays a key role in supporting, promoting, and coordinating with National and Regional initiatives. The following actions outline KCC's efforts to support digital access across the county.

> ### Pillar 1 Strategic Objective
> To support the continued development of digital infrastructure and connectivity across County Kilkenny.

NBP Rollout Support

KCC will continue to support the successful rollout of the NBP by coordinating with NBI and other key stakeholders. KCC's role in facilitating local connectivity and addressing local needs is essential to ensuring high-speed broadband access across County Kilkenny. The Broadband Officer plays a key role in the rollout of the NBP, liaising with NBI and telecom service providers and a local point of contact for the public regarding telecoms issues.

Access to Wireless Connectivity

Access to free public Wi-Fi, under the WIFI4EU initiative, in our major towns and villages is a major asset to our citizens, visitors and businesses. The continued development of free public Wi-Fi is essential to the digital inclusion of our communities. The Broadband Officer will continue to support the development of BCPs in rural County Kilkenny. These points act as community connectivity hubs in rural communities.

Promoting Public Connectivity

Beyond broadband, KCC will help promote the connectivity stakeholders - BCP's, remote working hubs and libraries, aiming to improve digital access for all citizens and support business and community engagement. The roll out of the 5G network continues to expand.

Exploring Smart City Opportunities

KCC will consider opportunities for future Smart City initiatives, exploring technologies and smart design solutions, for urban infrastructure such as energy, water, waste, transport systems and public spaces. The use of smart data to inform decision making is a key component. This is a shared goals across KCC service sections including the Climate Action team, Active Travel, LEO, Tourism, Roads, Environment, Planning, Housing and Parks

# KEY PILLARS – PILLAR 1

**Strategic Objective: To support the continued development of digital infrastructure and connectivity across County Kilkenny.**

| GOAL | LEAD | SUPPORT | ACTION |
|------|------|---------|--------|
| Facilitate the successful implementation of the NBP to ensure access to high-speed fibre broadband in designated areas. | Broadband Officer | NBI<br><br>KCC Planning Department | Work with NBI to support the continued rollout of the NBP by the target end date of 2026.<br><br>Provide timely responses to public enquiries related to the NBP. |
| Facilitate the roll-out of the Open Eir Ireland Fibre Network (IFN) scheme across the six main towns/villages | Broadband Officer | Open Eir<br><br>KCC Planning Department<br><br>Telecom Providers | Support Open Eir in the roll out of the IFN scheme. Provide timely responses to public enquiries related to the IFN scheme and liaise with telecoms providers to address local issues. |
| Increase awareness and usage of BCP's and remote working hubs in County Kilkenny. | Broadband Officer | LEO<br><br>Local Media | Promotion of BCP's and remote working hubs as locations to access high speed fibre broadband and remote working facilities through the 'Belong Kilkenny' website and the dedicated online platforms. |
| Support the delivery of the DRCD National Hub Strategy 2024 - 2027. | DRDC | Broadband Officer | Implement relevant actions identified in the DRCD National Hub Strategy 2024 -2027 under the pillar 'Digital Communities'. |
| Work with the DECC to comply with the EU Gigabit Infrastructure Act. | Roads Section/ Planning Department | DECC<br><br>Telecom Providers | Adhere to guidance issued by the DECC Gigabit Infrastructure Act working group to Local Authorities to assist with expanding the digital infrastructure. |

# KEY PILLARS – PILLAR 2

## Pillar 2: Digital Skills & Inclusion

The Digital Skills and Inclusion pillar focuses on KCC's supportive role in fostering a digitally inclusive Kilkenny, helping citizens develop the skills needed to engage confidently with digital services. KCC aims to enhance service delivery, promote meaningful community engagement, and reduce barriers to digital access. Recognising that digital transformation will benefit all citizens, this pillar places particular emphasis on vulnerable groups — such as older adults, individuals with disabilities, and disadvantaged communities. The KCC Age Friendly Strategy addresses this area in terms of digital inclusion amongst older people.

While KCC plays an important role, much of the direct delivery of digital training is facilitated through libraries and in collaboration with key stakeholders, including the Kilkenny and Carlow Education and Training Board (KCETB), BCPs, community organisations, and other local partners. This section outlines the key research findings that informed the strategic actions, which are designed to create an inclusive, digitally empowered community.

### Research Process & Background

To understand the digital needs and capabilities of Kilkenny's citizens, KCC conducted a comprehensive research process, including an online survey, in-person community forums, and consultation interviews. This research provided valuable insights into the digital skill levels, accessibility challenges, and perceived barriers to digital engagement, especially among vulnerable groups. Further details on the research and findings are available in the full consultation report in the Appendix.

### Research Findings Overview

While the online survey respondents self-reported a high level of confidence in their digital skills, the forum revealed some gaps in digital skills, particularly among vulnerable communities. These groups face challenges in accessing and navigating online services, often due to limited exposure to digital tools and a lack of training programmes for their demographic. In addition, barriers to digital adoption were identified, such as a lack of awareness of available digital resources and concerns regarding data privacy. Further, some citizens in these groups remain hesitant to use online services from lack of familiarity and questions on data accuracy and safety measures.

The forums and consultations highlighted the essential role of Kilkenny's connectivity stakeholders — such as the BCPs, Remote Working and Connected Hubs, and MANs — in supporting digital literacy and community engagement across rural areas of County Kilkenny. Another important connectivity stakeholder for this pillar includes KCC's libraries, offering free internet, digital resources, and digital training workshops in more central urban areas.

# KEY PILLARS – PILLAR 2

Additionally, the KCETB plays a key role in addressing some of these gaps by delivering structured digital training programmes focused on upskilling, vocational skills, and employment support. This underscores the importance of working with the KCETB to ensure a coordinated approach to digital literacy, particularly for those most at risk of digital exclusion.

*Actions: Enhancing Digital Skills & Inclusion*

Informed by the research findings, KCC developed actions to aid efforts in addressing the digital skill gaps of County Kilkenny's citizens. These initiatives focus on fostering collaboration with key stakeholders, enhancing awareness of available resources, and creating inclusive opportunities for citizens to engage with digital tools and training. By leveraging County Kilkenny's connectivity stakeholders and the KCETB, KCC aims to promote the various digital learning opportunities to ensure that all citizens, particularly those in vulnerable communities, can develop the skills needed to thrive in a digital-first world.

> **Pillar 2 Strategic Objective**
> To support the enhancement of digital literacy and skills for all citizens to create a connected and equitable community.

**Community Digital Literacy Support Services**

KCC, through the Broadband Officer, will support existing initiatives by building a cohesive network among connectivity stakeholders and the KCETB. This collaborative approach helps increase awareness of available digital training resources and streamline access for those most at risk of digital exclusion. With a proactive approach to liaising with stakeholders, KCC will continue supporting initiatives that help ensure every citizen has an equal opportunity to develop essential digital skills.

**Kilkenny Library Services**

The KCC Library Services is well-positioned to support the community's digital transformation, aligning closely with the National Public Library Strategy 2023 - 2027. Public libraries are vital hubs for digital inclusion, skills development, and access to new technologies, alongside their traditional role in promoting reading and literacy. KCC's Library service aims to inspire, connect, and empower local communities by offering access to innovative technologies, creative spaces, and digital services that support lifelong learning.

Kilkenny Libraries assist digital inclusion through access to technology including PCs, internet connectivity, free public wifi and mobile devices. The Mayfair library is an example of a key digital resource in promoting digital inclusion, offering citizens digital training opportunities, access to wifi, pcs and laptops and a 3D printing service. Further technological developments include 24/7 access to the library using My Open Library technology, EDUROAM enabled libraries and digitalised archive of the cultural heritage collection. Kilkenny libraries have ran coding programmes and recognise the importance of developing and supporting STEM activities.

### Promoting Digital Literacy at BCP's

Kilkenny's BCP's are central to delivering digital resources, especially in rural and remote areas. To help citizens fully benefit from these facilities, KCC will continue its close partnership to enhance awareness and accessibility, positioning these community sites as learning hubs for all Kilkenny citizens. This collaboration will extend the reach of digital skills programmes, creating a strong support system for citizens navigating the digital landscape.

**Strategic Objective: To support the enhancement of digital literacy and skills for all citizens to create a connected and equitable community.**

| GOAL | LEAD | SUPPORT | ACTION |
|---|---|---|---|
| Support digital literacy and training opportunities for citizens through working in partnership with the DRCD, KCETB, and local libraries. | Broadband Officer | DRCD/ KCETB/ BCPs/Remote Hubs/Kilkenny Libraries | Work in partnership with the DRCD to delivery innovative programme offered to BCPs<br><br>Liaise with the KCETB to assess digital literacy training needs and opportunities for BCP communities. Delivery digital literacy training programmes in BCPs. Working in partnership with BCPs, remote working hubs and libraries on the delivery of innovative programmes to improve digital skills |
| Promote BCP's, remote broadband working hubs and libraries as digital learning centres that foster digital inclusion in local communities | Broadband Officer | BCPs/ Remote Hubs/Kilkenny Libraries/ Local media | Promotion of the facilities and services available at BCPs, remote working hubs and libraries in terms of high speed fibre broadband, workspaces, online educational resources and access to technology under the banner 'More than just a Desk'. |
| Build the capacity of local libraries as digital resources within the community. | Kilkenny Library Services | KCC ICT Department | Further development of digital services and resources in libraries to harness digital inclusion. Areas include digital skills training, STEM Activities, 'My Open Library' technology. |

# KEY PILLARS – PILLAR 3

**Pillar 3: Digital Transformation of Business**

The Digital Transformation of Business pillar aims to support County Kilkenny's businesses in adopting the digital tools and skills necessary to thrive in today's competitive economy. This section will present key research findings, summarise current initiatives already in place, and outline KCC's actions for assisting business digitalisation across County Kilkenny.

*Research Process & Background*

To develop an informed strategy for supporting digital transformation of Kilkenny's businesses, KCC employed a structured approach to gather insights. Inviting local business leaders from various sectors, the in-person business forum captured diverse perspectives on digital transformation and insights into the unique challenges faced by SMEs, highlighting areas for KCC to provide potential support.



In addition to gathering the business community feedback, KCC reviewed existing initiatives and strategic frameworks aligned with current local programmes. This dual approach ensured the strategy would be built on current resources while addressing the unique needs of Kilkenny's business community, creating a cohesive and effective path for digital transformation. Further details on the forums and findings are in the Appendix.

*Current Digital Readiness of the Business Community*

County Kilkenny's business landscape is already vibrant and diverse — with significant strengths in agri-business, finance, and tourism/hospitality — ranking as the 8th largest employment centre in the state, according to the Southern Regional Assembly RSES[8]. However, during the forum, business leaders reported disparities in personal skill levels, challenges with online visibility, and barriers for SMEs in rural areas.

The forum also revealed a strong interest in AI, with many questions raised around its potential uses and safety implications. While County Kilkenny's current trajectory toward business digitisation is a promising foundation, businesses expressed a need for support to explore these emerging technologies. Combined with the support available from local initiatives such as the Local Enterprise Office (LEO), these advancements can further strengthen County Kilkenny's position as a competitive leader in the digital economy.

# KEY PILLARS – PILLAR 3

*Initiatives & Strategic Frameworks*

There are many established key initiatives and strategic frameworks that provide valuable resources for County Kilkenny's businesses. These programmes and plans are designed to strengthen digital capabilities, connectivity, and competitiveness across various sectors. By aligning with both National and Local strategies, KCC can create informed actions that strengthen these resources for County Kilkenny's SMEs. The following tables summarise each initiative's purpose, its relevance to County Kilkenny, and current alignment status.

National Level Initiatives and Plans

## NATIONAL BROADBAND PLAN (NBP)[7]

Designed to extend high-speed internet to underserved rural areas, providing critical support to remote businesses and communities. Enables digital engagement across all sectors, bridging the connectivity gap for rural areas and enhancing competitiveness for local businesses.

**Current Status**

115,495 full fibre connections made by NBI across Ireland. 351,362 premises are now available for pre-order/order.

BCPs have been established in rural areas, and coverage continues to expand to meet local demand.

## REGIONAL SPATIAL AND ECONOMIC STRATEGY (RSES)[8]

Recognises County Kilkenny's strategic importance as a business hub, encouraging digitalisation in key areas like agri-business, finance, tourism, and Smart City Development to enhance urban connectivity and resources management.

**Current Status**

County Kilkenny integrates RSES goals within its local strategies, aligning with digital, economic development, and Smart City initiatives.

KCC plans to explore smart city solutions, with a focus on foundational infrastructure.

# KEY PILLARS – PILLAR 3

## GROW DIGITAL[15] AND DIGITAL FOR BUSINESS[16]

Enterprise Ireland & LEO initiatives providing grants and support to help small businesses embrace digital technology. Offers critical support to Kilkenny's SMEs, particularly those newly engaging with digital commerce.

| Current Status | Actively promoted by LEO, benefiting local SMEs. |
|---|---|

Local Level Initiatives

## BELONG KILKENNY

Supports newcomers and businesses relocating to Kilkenny, promoting the area as a place for remote work, quality of life, and work-life balance.

| Current Status | Continually active, fostering a welcoming environment and supporting a diverse talent pool through relocation incentives. |
|---|---|

## KCETB

Partners with local stakeholders to deliver custom training programmes, apprenticeships, and work-based learning options.

| Current Status | Active; KCETB offers ongoing programmes tailored to current market needs and employer requirements. |
|---|---|

## INVEST KILKENNY

Promotes Kilkenny as an attractive business destination, supporting local economic development and increasing visibility for Kilkenny enterprises.

| Current Status | Ongoing, with a focus on digital marketing, business resources, and promoting Kilkenny's competitive advantage to attract investment. |
|---|---|

# KEY PILLARS – PILLAR 3

## LOCAL ENTERPRISE OFFICE (LEO)

Provides essential business support programmes, including Grow Digital and Digital for Business schemes to help SMEs with digital technology, skills training, and online visibility.

**Current Status**

Actively running digital adoption and skills programmes.

New 'Grow Digital' programme will assist SMEs in adopting advanced digital technologies (e.g., e-commerce, cybersecurity).

## VISIT KILKENNY

Dedicated to promoting Kilkenny's tourism and hospitality industry, enhancing the online visibility of local businesses through digital marketing and event promotion.

**Current Status**

Continuously active, updating content and tools, such as a new mobile app, to attract tourists and support Kilkenny's status as a cultural destination.

*Actions: Supporting Digital Transformation of Business*

KCC designed the following actions to assist in empowering County Kilkenny's businesses by addressing the key challenges and opportunities identified through the research and consultation conducted. These initiatives aim to enhance awareness of digital resources, strengthen connectivity, and foster innovation, ensuring that businesses are equipped to thrive in a competitive digital economy. Through collaboration with stakeholders at the Local and National levels, KCC will support the digital transformation of County Kilkenny's business community and driving long-term economic growth.

### Pillar 3 Strategic Objective
To support the digital transformation of business, allowing them to thrive in a competitive digital economy and ensuring long-term economic growth and resilience.

# KEY PILLARS – PILLAR 3

*Promoting Awareness of Existing Digital Resources*

KCC recognises the essential role of digital tools in maintaining competitiveness and sustainability for local businesses, especially SMEs. To support these businesses, KCC will actively promote Local and National digital initiatives and facilitate access to essential resources. By increasing awareness and coordinating business resources, KCC aims to empower local businesses to embrace digital tools and engage effectively in the digital marketplace.

*Support SMEs to tap into the digital economy*

The LEO is situated within Kilkenny County Council and provides a one-stop shop for enterprise supports in the county, providing a range of business support services aimed at cultivating entrepreneurship, to stimulate growth and creating employment in start-ups and small businesses. The LEO encourage SMEs to engage in the 'Digital for Business' programme and 'Grow Digital' programme to enhance their online trading presence and digital technology. SME's can avail of social media training and digital marketing clinics. LEO run information and training events under their 'Digitalisation' pillar in areas including Cyber Security, IT solutions and AI.

*Smart Data*

As AI and Smart Data technologies gain prominence in Ireland's business landscape, these are areas in which local businesses can benefit in terms of business planning and decision making. Access to smart retail data from a credit card company will assist local retailers to identify local spend levels, trends, shopping patterns to inform their decision making, planning and development of their business needs in the current market and long term.

*Connectivity and Infrastructure Support*

Reliable high-speed internet and modern infrastructure are essential for County Kilkenny's businesses to fully engage in the digital economy. In line with the NBP and other key initiatives, KCC will work alongside National and Local stakeholders to advocate for continued infrastructure development and support the creation of targeted development plans for BCPs. These efforts aim to close connectivity gaps, particularly in rural and remote areas, to ensure equitable access to digital opportunities.

*Smart Business Initiatives*

As AI and Smart Data technologies gain prominence in Ireland's business landscape, LEO can act as a facilitator working with National agencies and private businesses to explore and align relevant AI and data-driven initiatives. By collaborating with private and public sectors in this space, KCC aims to help County Kilkenny businesses leverage these technologies effectively and safely.

# KEY PILLARS – PILLAR 3

**Strategic Objective: To support the digital transformation of business to thrive in a competitive digital economy and evolving technological environment.**
.

| GOAL | LEAD | SUPPORT | ACTION |
|---|---|---|---|
| Provide support to local SME's to assist in the digital transformation of their business to improve efficiency, productivity and innovation. | LEO | Enterprise Ireland | Encourage SME's to engage in the LEO 'Digital for Business' programme and 'Grow Digital' programme.<br><br>Promote opportunities to develop social media skills through the social media training and digital marketing clinics.<br><br>Engagement in information and training events under the LEO 'Digitalisation' pillar – Cyber Security, IT solutions, AI. |
| Promote the availability of local remote working facilities to businesses and the public in BCP's and remote working hubs. | Broadband Officer | BCPs<br><br>Remote Hubs<br><br>LEO<br><br>Local media | Collaborate with BCPs and remote working hubs to develop an action plan to promote their facilities as remote working spaces, event spaces and community businesses.<br><br>Promote the use of BCP's through the 'Connected Communities' website.<br><br>Create awareness of remote working hubs through the 'Belong Kilkenny' website and links to the 'Connected Hub' website. |
| Use digital technologies to improve the tourism offering in County Kilkenny. | Tourism Officer, KCC | LEO<br><br>Fáilte Ireland<br><br>Kilkenny Tourism | Utilise advanced technology to increase opportunities to develop the number of apps, audio guides, VR/AR experience at tourist destinations. Digital signage at tourist attractions. |
| Explore the use of smart retail spend data from a credit card company to collate retail data on local trends and shopping habits to inform business decision making. | LEO | KCC ICT Department | Source retail spend data from the approved credit card company to assist local retailers with identifying local spend levels, trends, patterns in terms of decision making, planning and development of their business needs. |

# KEY PILLARS – PILLAR 4

## Pillar 4: Digitalisation of Public Services

The Digitalisation of Public Services pillar focuses on enhancing service delivery, improving the citizen's digital journey, and streamlining KCC's operations using digital technologies. The goal is to create a seamless, user-friendly digital experience that improves accessibility for citizens, while also optimising internal processes for staff to dedicate more time to focus on the citizen experience. Built on research conducted by KCC, this section will provide background information on the Local Government Management Agency's (LGMA) Digital Local Government strategy; detail the current digital Citizen Customer Journey experience; outline key themes to develop the digital systems and enhance the digital skills across the KCC service area.

### Research Process & Background

KCC's thorough research process, detailed further in the Appendix, identified the operational needs and challenges faced by various departments, helping focus the strategy on specific areas for digital enhancement. Looking at the Citizen Customer Journeys further highlighted gaps for specific high-volume services within each service area, placing a strong emphasis on understanding the citizen's experience when interacting with KCC's digital services. Externally, the in-person community forums provided deeper insights into citizen experiences, particularly for vulnerable groups. This research laid the groundwork for identifying key themes that will help position KCC to meet today's users' digital expectations.

### Citizen Customer Journey Overview

KCC recognises the importance of optimising the Citizen Customer Journey. Ensuring a smooth, accessible, and satisfying digital interaction benefits citizens by enriching their overall experience with KCC. Thus, a clear, well-supported customer journey helps build trust, encourages engagement, and fosters a deeper connection between citizens and KCC.

KCC gathered insights into the citizen experience across key service areas, helping map — or write the steps citizens take to complete a task — numerous journeys. These insights illuminate how citizens interact with KCC's digital platforms, the pathways they follow to access services, and their expectations when engaging online.

Currently, KCC staff work together to ensure citizens needs are sufficiently met. However, while creating the customer journeys, KCC identified areas for digital improvement that could enhance citizens' experiences. For example, in the case studies on the next page, KCC unveiled some inefficiencies for citizens — and staff — in various situations and service areas.

# KEY PILLARS – PILLAR 4

## CASE STUDY 1: BOOKING A LIBRARY EVENT

*Current Journey*
A citizen initiates their search by visiting the Kilkenny library's website to check for scheduled events. When navigating the site, the citizen makes multiple clicks to locate the 'what's on' page. In its current layout, the citizen may experience difficulty scanning the events page and resorts to calling the library for clarification. Once the event is located, booking must be done manually via phone, so they must call the library again. There is no confirmation of attendance outside of the initial verbal phone call. High-demand events necessitate staff individually calling each attendee to confirm attendance, and waitlists are managed manually. On the event day, attendance is tracked through manual checks, and post-event feedback or inquiries are handled via phone or in-person interactions due to the absence of an online feedback system.



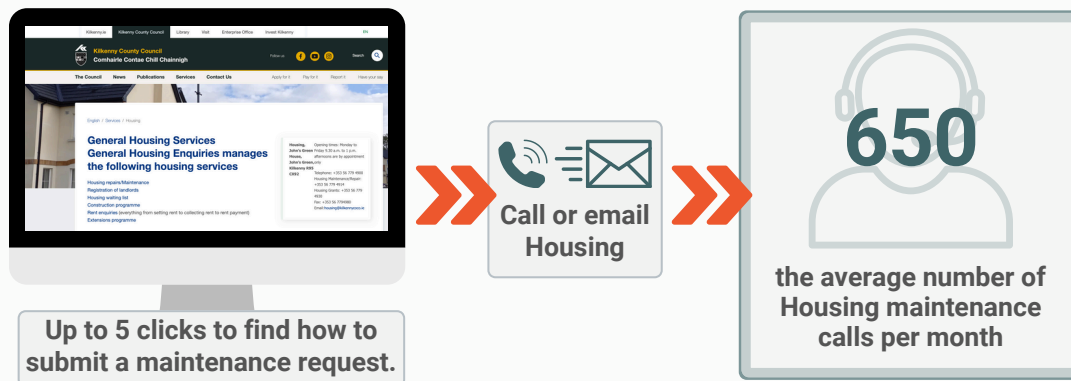| Home Page | Events Page | Search Page | Event Page | Call to RSVP |
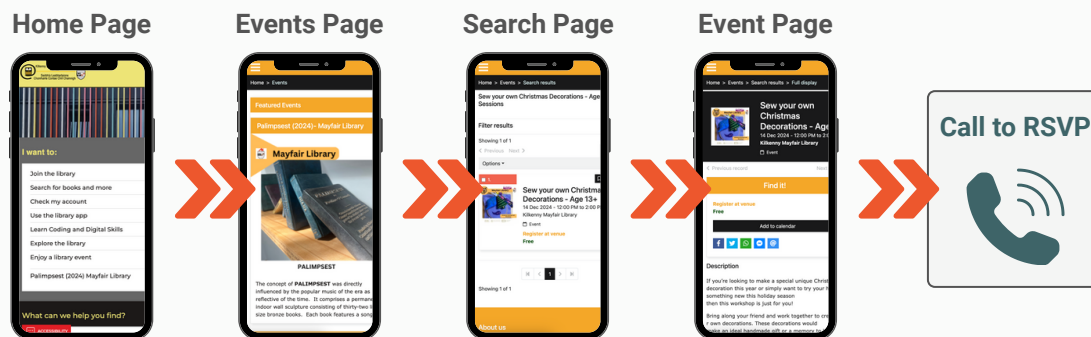
*Challenges and Opportunities*
This customer journey underscores the need for streamlined, digital-first solutions. Simplifying website navigation, integrating an online booking system with automated confirmations, and incorporating digital tools for managing RSVPs and feedback could significantly enhance the citizen experience. These changes would reduce the administrative burden on library staff, improve the efficiency of event management, and create a more user-friendly process for citizens, ultimately fostering greater community participation and satisfaction.

# KEY PILLARS – PILLAR 4

## CASE STUDY 2: REPORTING A HOUSING MAINTENANCE ISSUE

*Current Journey*
A citizen notices a maintenance issue in their home, such as a leaking pipe or a broken window, and decides to report it. They begin by visiting the KCC website, but the Housing site's layout makes it hard to locate instructions. The citizen ends up calling the Housing department directly. A clerical officer asks for the citizen's details and records the issue manually in an Excel spreadsheet. In the background, a foreman reviews the list of logged requests and assigns tasks to the appropriate maintenance crew or contractor. The citizen has no way to track the progress of their request, so they call the housing department again for updates. Once the repair is complete, the foreman updates the spreadsheet. If the issue persists, the citizen must start the process over.



**Up to 5 clicks to find how to submit a maintenance request.**

**Call or email Housing**

**650**

**the average number of Housing maintenance calls per month**
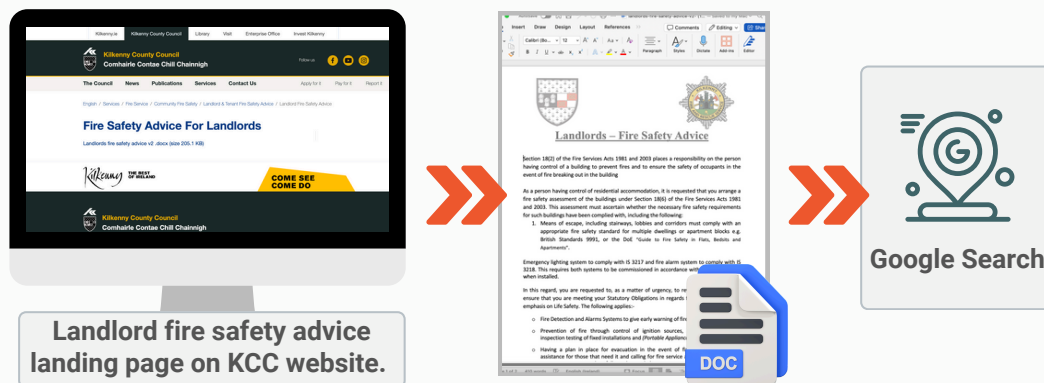
*Challenges and Opportunities*
This customer journey highlights the need for modern, digital-first solutions to streamline the reporting and resolution of maintenance issues. Implementing a user-friendly online form would help immediately streamline the citizen experience and reduce phone calls for KCC staff. As a long-term solution, adopting a digital workflow powered by a customer relationship management (CRM) system could significantly reduce manual tasks, improve accuracy, and enable automation capabilities to increase and improve communication to citizens. These enhancements would reduce uncertainty for citizens, provide real-time visibility into request statuses, and minimise the need for follow-up calls, helping citizens build trust and satisfaction in KCC.

# KEY PILLARS – PILLAR 4

## CASE STUDY 3: LANDLORDS SEEKING FIRE SAFETY ADVICE

*Current Journey*
A landlord begins their search for fire safety advice by conducting a Google search for "Kilkenny fire safety". They navigate to the KCC Fire Safety webpage on the Kilkenny County Council website. The landing page contains minimal information, primarily listing many links to other resources. The landlord clicks through several links, but many lead to external websites or downloadable documents, and some result in "page not found" errors. Eventually, they find a Word document titled "Landlords – Fire Safety Advice". It contains general guidance with no visuals, and outside of the logos, there is no KCC branding. The landlord is left wondering when the document was last updated and if they received all of the required information. They go back to Google for additional resources.



**Landlord fire safety advice landing page on KCC website.**

**Google Search**

*Challenges and Opportunities*
This customer journey highlights the need for clearer, more accessible fire safety information. Enhancing the Fire Safety webpage with user-friendly content, streamlined navigation, and interactive tools could improve the experience for citizens seeking information on fire and safety in Kilkenny. Reworking the webpages to include text on the webpage without the need to download files, unless necessary, and with comprehensive, visually engaging fire safety resources would reduce the effort required to find information, enabling citizens to access guidance quickly and efficiently. These improvements would not only assist landlords, but also promote greater compliance with fire safety regulations, fostering a safer community overall.

# KEY PILLARS – PILLAR 4

*Alignment with LGMA's Digital Local Government Strategy*

The LGMA's Digital Local Government: Working for Everyone Strategy [17] aims to modernise and elevate the digital capabilities of local governments throughout Ireland. The plan emphasises citizen-centric website design, ensuring services are accessible, inclusive, and efficient. Broken down into Now Actions (years 1-2), Next Actions (years 3-4), and Later Actions (years 5-6), the strategy also focuses on the integration of innovative technologies to improve service delivery, fostering consistency, transparency, and user satisfaction across Local Authorities, creating a unified, modernised public service framework.

Key Target: To achieve the ambition of having 90% of applicable Local Government services consumed online by 2030.

| | |
|---|---|
| **Digital Services** | "provide easier digital access to local government services and encourage people to use them by improving consistency and taking a people-centred approach to designing those services." |
| **Digital Communities** | "provide digital access., connectivity, and support for members of the public and businesses to improve quality of life in our communities, while ensuring that everyone is included." |
| **Digital Workforce** | "give our staff the technology, digital tools and skills required to fully interact in a digital way." |
| **Digital Systems** | "improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the way we work through the implementation of identified technology solutions and enhanced data usage." |

**Key Themes Identified**

Building on the key research findings, KCC will develop targeted actions across the service areas to address identified needs and opportunities. These actions will be guided by eight high-level themes, outlined below, designed to enhance service delivery and citizen engagement over the life of this strategy and beyond.

- CRM system with multi-tool function
- Dedicated role for digital communications and marketing
- Digital communications and online services
- Cyber Security

- Review and upgrade of digital infrastructure - systems, processes, hardware, and software
- Review and update of the KCC website
- Data-driven decision making
- Digital skills training needs of internal staff

# KEY PILLARS – PILLAR 4

These areas will ensure that immediate needs are addressed while laying the foundation for longer-term goals. All actions will align under one overarching strategic objective.

**Strategic Objective: To streamline and enhance service delivery by leveraging digital technologies, ensuring that all citizens and businesses can access services efficiently and inclusively.**

Kilkenny County Council is committed to driving innovation in public services and is continually striving to improve and develop the services provided to the public. The vision of this pillar is to improve key public services, focusing on driving efficiencies and accessibility for all and designing digital public services that are inclusive by default. Delivery of customer service is a fundamental role of KCC and digital technology is key to transforming the design and delivery of services to meet the needs of citizens and businesses.

There are two aspects in terms of the digitalisation of public services by local government in order to improve services and take a people-centred approach to designing those services,
1. Digital systems – to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the way KCC work through the implementation of technology solutions and 2. Digital workforce – to provide staff with the technology, digital tools and skills required to fully interact in a digital way.

# KEY PILLARS – PILLAR 4

**Pillar 4 Strategic Objective**
To streamline and enhance service delivery by leveraging digital technologies, ensuring that all citizens and businesses can access services efficiently and inclusively.

## Digitalisation of Public Services - Eight Key Themes

### 1. Customer Relationship Management (CRM) System

An effective multi-tool communication platform was identified as a key driver for effective service delivery through the research conducted as part of this process.

### 2. Review and upgrade of Digital Infrastructure - Systems, Processes , hardware and software

To continue to meet the evolving technology needs and infrastructure requirements to maintain and enhance customer service, ongoing review and investment in Digital Infrastructure was identified as a key theme.

# KEY PILLARS – PILLAR 4

## 3. Cyber Security

The importance of adequate Cyber Security measures is a key area of focus across the public service. The integrity of internal networks and data can be enhanced through the implementation of advanced systems and threat detection software.

## 4. Kilkenny County Council Website

The Kilkenny County Council website was identified as the primary online interaction between Kilkenny citizens and the Local Authority. It is vital that information and services, through the website, are accessible, current and relevant to all users

## 5. Digital Communications and Online Services

The importance of effective digital communication and the ease of access to documentation/online forms was highlighted as a theme for further exploration.

# KEY PILLARS – PILLAR 4

### 6. Data-Driven Decision Making

The availability and optimisation of smart data through existing and new sources was identified as a key component of effective decision making.

### 7. Dedicated Role for Digital Communications and Marketing

The centralisation of digital communications and marketing was highlighted as a key area in creating consistency and confidence in the Local Authority, and ensuring strong brand recognition.

### 8. Digital Skills Training Needs of Internal Staff

To facilitate the digital transformation of the Local Authority, it is vital that all staff members have access to ongoing training to develop their digital skills.

# MONITORING & EVALUATION

In terms of the commitment to ensuring the successful implementation of the KCC Digital Strategy 2025 – 2027, KCC will actively monitor progress and evaluate outcomes. This section outlines the high-level approach KCC will take to track achievements, ensure accountability, and continuously refine the strategy to meet the needs of citizens, businesses, and staff.

## Monitoring Framework

KCC will set up an internal working group  to assess the impact of its digital actions and evaluate progress toward strategic goals. This will be led by the Broadband Officer in terms of oversight of the implementation plan, organising internal working group meetings and agenda, and preparing progress reports.

This monitoring framework will involve:

Measuring progress using clearly defined indicators that align with the overall vision of the strategy.

Gathering feedback from citizens, businesses, and staff to ensure the initiatives are effective, inclusive, and responsive.

Reviewing outcomes periodically to identify strengths, challenges, and areas for improvement.

## Reporting and Transparency

KCC is committed to transparency in the delivery of its Digital Strategy. Annual progress reports  will be presented to the internal working group to highlight key achievements, challenges, and amendments. There will be update to stakeholders to ensure they remain informed of the strategy's impact and provide opportunities for ongoing engagement.

## Adaptive Approach

The dynamic nature of digital transformation requires a strategy that can adapt to new challenges and opportunities. The findings from monitoring and evaluation activities will inform adjustments and amendments to priorities and objectives, enabling KCC to remain flexible and ensure the strategy continues to meet its objectives effectively.

# CONCLUSION

KCC's Digital Strategy 2025 – 2027 creates a connected, inclusive, and future-ready County Kilkenny. This strategy outlines a clear vision for leveraging digital technologies to enhance the quality of life for citizens, drive economic growth, and improve the delivery of public services. The strategy builds upon County Kilkenny's strengths while addressing challenges through targeted actions. By focusing on digital infrastructure, digital skills and inclusion, digital transformation of business, and digitisation of public services, KCC is laying the foundation for sustainable progress that benefits all citizens and businesses.

KCC recognises that the journey toward digital transformation is an ongoing process. Success will rely on collaboration with citizens, businesses, and other stakeholders, as well as a commitment to adaptability in the face of an evolving digital landscape and the challenges posed by climate change. Through continuous monitoring and evaluation, KCC will ensure that the strategy remains relevant and impactful, responding effectively to the needs of citizens.

In closing, Kilkenny County Council extends its gratitude to all those who contributed to the development of this strategy. Together, County Kilkenny will work to achieve a digitally inclusive community that embraces innovation, fosters opportunity, and thrives in the digital age. KCC warmly invites all stakeholders to remain engaged and supportive throughout the strategy, helping bring this vision to life.

# APPENDIX – KCC RESEARCH REPORT

The development of KCC's Digital Strategy was informed by a comprehensive research process designed to capture the needs, priorities, and challenges of citizens, businesses, and stakeholders. This process included two key phases: a Digital Audit and Stakeholder Consultation, which collectively shaped the Strategy's four pillars: Digital Infrastructure, Digital Skills and Inclusion, Digital Transformation of Business, and Digitisation of Public Services.

By engaging a diverse range of stakeholders and thoroughly evaluating KCC's digital systems, the research ensured alignment with both local aspirations and broader national and regional initiatives. This Appendix provides a detailed overview of the research performed and the findings from the analysis, offering actionable insights that underpin the strategy's commitment to enhancing service delivery, fostering inclusivity, and driving innovation across County Kilkenny.

## Digital Audit

The Digital Audit provided an in-depth evaluation of KCC's existing digital assets, systems, and services. It was designed to uncover inefficiencies, identify opportunities for improvement, and assess the overall user experience.

### Technical Website Analysis

More than 400 webpages on the KCC website were reviewed to assess navigation, usability, content structure, search engine optimisation (SEO) and accessibility. Notable issues includes the accidental duplication of the website, posing risks to search engine visibility and user experience. The audit also uncovered SEO and usability challenges across service areas, necessitating action to prevent diminished user engagement and reliance on inefficient traditional interaction methods. Overall, this step identified where the website could be improved to better serve citizens and align with accessibility best practices.

### Stakeholder Interviews

Interviews with staff from 14 key service areas explored the internal workflows, challenges, and opportunities for optimisation. These discussions provided valuable operational insights and highlighted the importance of enhancing internal systems to support staff and citizens alike. After analysing the research findings, eight key themes were identified, which were grouped into two main categories, detailed on the next page.

# APPENDIX – KCC RESEARCH REPORT

## Group 1: KCC Digital Assets

| THEME | DESCRIPTION |
|---|---|
| **Upgrading Digital Infrastructure** | Modernising systems to improve digital service delivery |
| **Enhancing Public Engagement & Communication** | Using digital platforms for better citizen engagement & communication |
| **Data-Driven Decision Making** | Enhancing service delivery & decision- making through better use of data |
| **Digital Accessibility & Inclusivity** | Ensuring digital services are accessible and inclusive for all Kilkenny County citizens |

## Group 2: KCC Internal Process

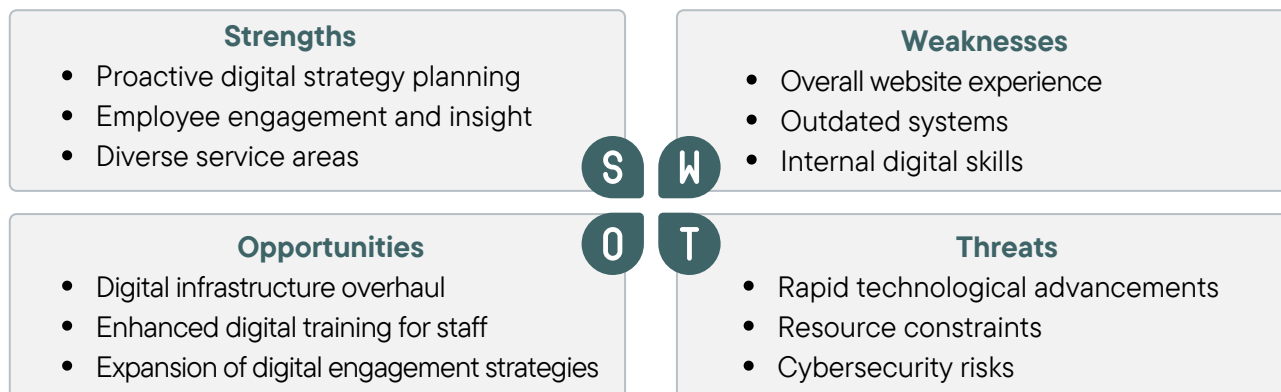| THEME | DESCRIPTION |
|---|---|
| **Digital Training & Skills Development** | Emphasis on continuous professional growth & proficiency in digital service delivery |
| **Streamlining Internal Digital Processes** | Focus on creating uniform procedures for routine tasks to eliminate inefficiencies |
| **Council-Wide Collaboration & Communication** | Enhancing communication & resource sharing across departments for unified digital initiatives |
| **Balancing Technology with Human-Centric Service** | Balancing digital engagement with the necessity of maintaining personal interactions |

# APPENDIX – KCC RESEARCH REPORT

*Customer Journey Mapping*

KCC also conducted customer journey mapping to understand the steps citizens take when accessing KCC's most frequently used services. Multiple high-demand services were identified through consultations with KCC staff, and their processes were manually mapped from start to finish. This approach revealed critical pain points, including inefficiencies in reporting and tracking requests, manual processes, and lack of real-time updates for citizens. Below is a summary example of the overall Citizen Customer Journey.
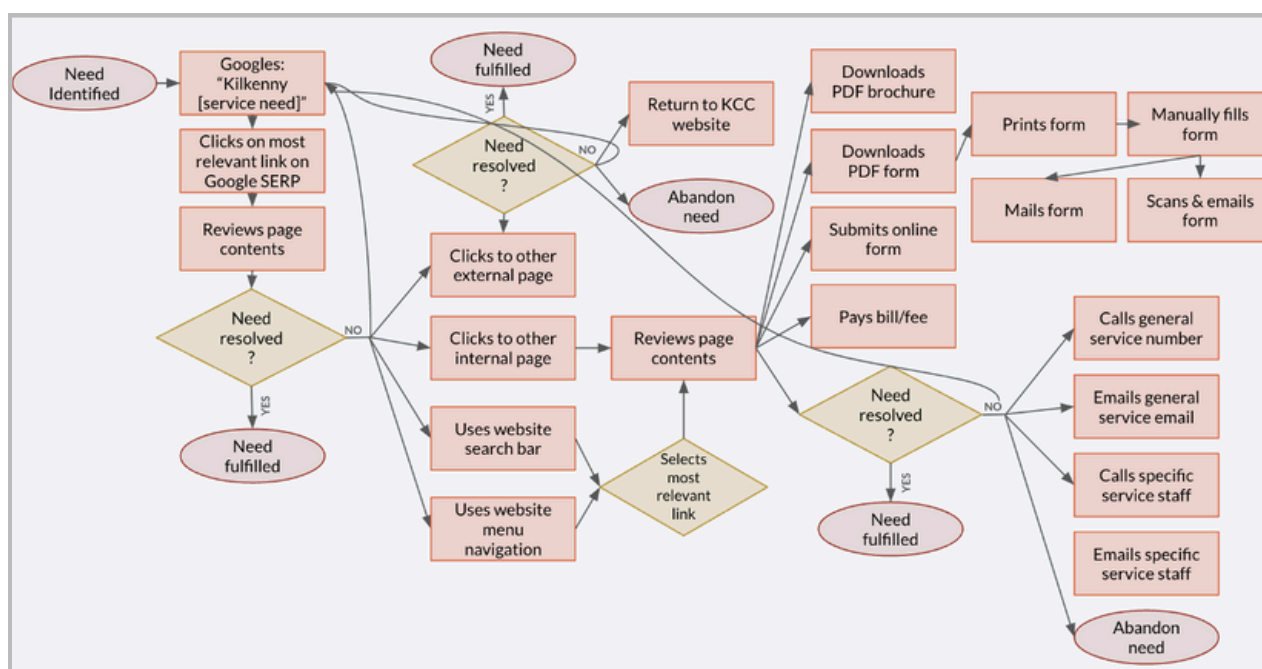


*SWOT Analysis*

After reviewing all of the research findings collectively, a SWOT analysis was created to provide a strategic assessment of internal strengths and weaknesses as well as external opportunities and threats.

**Strengths**
- Proactive digital strategy planning
- Employee engagement and insight
- Diverse service areas

**Weaknesses**
- Overall website experience
- Outdated systems
- Internal digital skills

**Opportunities**
- Digital infrastructure overhaul
- Enhanced digital training for staff
- Expansion of digital engagement strategies

**Threats**
- Rapid technological advancements
- Resource constraints
- Cybersecurity risks

# APPENDIX – KCC RESEARCH REPORT

*Overview of Insights*

The audit findings provided a comprehensive understanding of the current digital landscape, offering actionable insights for future enhancements in both public-facing services and internal operations.

**Website Usability**
Navigation challenges, outdated content, and inconsistent design were common barriers to a seamless user experience.

**Internal Processes**
Reliance on manual workflows and siloed systems created inefficiencies and increased response times.

**Citizen Experience**
Customer journey mapping highlighted barriers in accessing services, such as the absence of online forms for maintenance requests and a lack of proactive status updates.

## Stakeholder Consultations

The stakeholder consultations further enhanced KCC's research process, ensuring the diverse voices of Kilkenny's citizens, businesses, and key stakeholders were captured. These consultations provided valuable insights into the digital needs and challenges faced by the community, as well as opportunities to align KCC's efforts with broader national and regional initiatives.
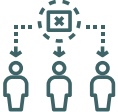
*Stakeholder Interviews*

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with KCC staff from key service areas and external stakeholders, such as the KCETB and BCPs. These discussions provided operational insights into existing systems, challenges, and opportunities for collaboration on digital transformation.

| KCC Internal Stakeholders | | External Stakeholders |
|---|---|---|
| Climate Action Unit | Human Resources | Broadband Connection Points |
| Corporate Services | ICT | |
| Environment Services | Local Enterprise Office | Kilkenny and Carlow Education and Training Board |
| Finance | Library Services | |
| Fire & Rescue Services | Planning | |
| Housing Services | Roads Services | |

# APPENDIX – KCC RESEARCH REPORT

The findings show six common themes among the stakeholder interviews:

**Website Usability**
Poor navigation and limited content management tools hinder user and KCC staff experience.

**Internal Workflows**
Reliance on manual processes increases inefficiencies and staff workloads.

**Digital Systems**
Lack of integration between internal tools leads to communication and operational delays.

**Data Sharing**
Limited data-sharing capabilities between digital tools and departments can slow service delivery.

**Resources**
Hardware inefficiency, digital training needs, and expanded responsibilities strain departments.

**Citizen Engagement**
Government-funded services, like BCPs and KCETB, face difficulties in engaging citizens to utilise free digital services.

*Public Online Digital Survey*

A public digital survey was posted on the Kilkenny County Council consult.ie web section to gather input from a wide cross-section of Kilkenny's citizens. Respondents included citizens, businesses, and other stakeholders who provided feedback on topics such as digital skills, service accessibility, and desired improvements in online services.

| # | QUESTION |
|---|----------|
| **Part 1: General Community** | |
| 1. | What digital services do you currently use from Kilkenny County Council (KCC)? |
| 2. | How would you rate your overall experience with KCC's digital services? |

3.   Please provide any specific feedback or suggestions for improvement.

4.   What improvements or new services would you like to see in KCC's digital offerings?

5.   How do you feel about the current digital infrastructure in your area (e.g., internet connectivity, service reliability)?

6.   Please elaborate on any issues or improvements needed.

7.   What digital skills do you possess, and are there any skills you feel you need to develop further?

8.   How easy or difficult do you find interacting with KCC's online services?

9.   Please provide specific feedback.

10.  What are your impressions of the KCC website (https://kilkennycoco.ie/) in terms of usability, design, and content?

11.  What specific improvements would you recommend?

### Part 2: Business-Related (if applicable)

12.  What digital services provided by KCC do you currently use in your business operations?

13.  How can KCC support local businesses in adopting new digital technologies?

14.  What economic data or insights would be valuable for your business that KCC could provide digitally?

### Part 3: Disability & Social Inclusion (if applicable)

15.  How satisfied or unsatisfied are you with KCC's digital services?

16.  Please provide any specific feedback on accessibility.

17.  Would you agree or disagree with the statement: "KCC's services are accessible to me"?

18.  What kind of support or resources would help you and others in the community to use KCC's digital services more effectively?

19.  How do you envision the future of digital services provided by KCC in terms of accessibility and inclusivity?

20.  Any additional feedback or suggestions for KCC's digital strategy to better serve the community, including those with disabilities?

# APPENDIX – KCC RESEARCH REPORT

The public survey received responses from 14 participants, providing valuable insights into the digital needs, challenges, and aspirations of the community. The themes outlined below capture the main areas for improvement and opportunities for digital transformation.

**Website Navigation**
Usability and outdated design make it difficult for users to find forms, access services, and complete tasks, leading to reliance on phone/email inquiries; call for simplified language and an updated website designed for citizens' experience.

> … the website should be framed as "what it can offer me [the citizen]" as opposed to "here's everything you can do" …
> Seems like a very transactional-type language.
>
> *– Citizen Survey Respondent*

**KCC Services Awareness**
Limited awareness of available KCC services, hindering adoption of digital services.

**Digital Infrastructure**
Gaps in rural connectivity and public Wi-Fi access, with calls for more inclusive and reliable digital infrastructure.

**Digital Skills**
A varied response, with some confidence and lack thereof in digital skills, with demand for training in advanced areas like AI, digital marketing, and analytics.

**Inclusivity and Accessibility**
Feedback highlighted the need for dyslexia-friendly fonts and improved accessibility features for disabled users.

**Business Support**
Businesses seek grants, training, and digital marketing support to enhance their online presence, alongside tools like localised economic insights and workshops.

**Community Engagement**
Respondents expressed a desire for more visible promotion of local events, services, and amenities through digital channels.

# APPENDIX – KCC RESEARCH REPORT

*In-Person Public Consultation Forums*

On 17 July 2024, KCC conducted two in-person public consultation forums at the Kilkenny Mayfair Library. Nineteen participants representing community organisations and local businesses attended these sessions, offering diverse perspectives on digital transformation and highlighting specific challenges faced by County Kilkenny's citizens. Both forums were setup as three-hour, semi-structured, open discussions and guided by a moderator with opportunities for networking and a wrap-up summarising key points and outlining next steps.

The primary objectives were to understand the unique needs of each group, identify areas for improvement in KCC's digital services, and ensure that underrepresented voices, particularly those of individuals with disabilities, were included in the Digital Strategy 2025 – 2027.

The following organisations and businesses were represented at the forums:

| Community Organisations | |
| --- | --- |
| Droichead Family Resource Centre (Callan) | Nore Vision |
| KCETB (Adult Education Office) | Older People's Council Executive Committee |
| Kilkenny Disability Access Group | Ossory Youth |
| Kilkenny Recreation and Sports Partnership | The Thomas Hayes Trust / Teac Tom |
| Muckalee Community Centre (BCP) | Urlingford Town Team |

| Businesses | |
| --- | --- |
| Bank of Ireland | |
| KCC Local Enterprise Office | Prochem |
| KCC Tourism Office | The Butterslip Shop |
| Kilkenny Chamber of Commerce | WeDo Work Spaces |

The findings from the in-person forums provide valuable insights into the digital challenges and opportunities facing County Kilkenny citizens and businesses. Participants highlighted key issues, underscoring the importance of increasing awareness of KCC's digital services and implementing more structured digital education initiatives.

# APPENDIX – KCC RESEARCH REPORT

### Digital Literacy
Gaps in digital literacy exist among older adults, individuals with disabilities, and disadvantaged groups, hindering their ability to access and use digital services effectively.

### Accessibility
Inconsistent accessibility features across digital services create challenges for individuals with disabilities, highlighting the need for tailored solutions and inclusive design practices.

### Accessibility Example
A common missing website feature for screen reader accessibility is properly structured headings (H1, H2, H3) and alt text for images. Without these, screen readers cannot navigate content logically or describe visual elements to users with visual impairments.

### Connectivity
Rural areas continue to face inadequate broadband access, limiting residents' and businesses' ability to participate fully in the digital economy.

### Support for SMEs
Small businesses struggle with accessing resources, navigating digital tools, and improving online visibility, underscoring a need for targeted support in digital marketing, funding, and training.

### Community Awareness
Low awareness of available KCC digital services prevents citizens and businesses from fully leveraging existing resources, emphasizing the importance of better communication and outreach efforts.

### Digital Education and Engagement
A lack of structured digital education in schools and communities creates disparities in digital proficiency, particularly among students and vulnerable populations.

# SOURCES

1    The European Commission | EU Digital Decade 2030:
https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/europes-digital-decade

2    The European Commission | WiFi4EU:
https://wifi4eu.ec.europa.eu/

3    Department of Environment, Climate and Communications | Climate Action Plan 2024:
https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/79659-climate-action-plan-2024/

4    Department of Public Expenditure | Connected Government 2030:
https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/136b9-connecting-government-2030-a-digital-and-ict-strategy-for-irelands-public-service/

5    Local Government Ireland | Digital Local Government: Working for Everyone:
https://www.lgma.ie/en/what-we-do/programme-management-and-innovation/digital-ict-strategy_2024_2030_web_final-compressed.pdf

6    Harnessing Digital | The Digital Ireland Framework:
https://assets.gov.ie/214584/fa3161da-aa9d-4b11-b160-9cac3a6f6148.pdf

7    National Broadband Ireland | National Broadband Plan:
https://nbi.ie/

8    Southern Regional Assembly | Regional Spatial & Economic Strategy:
https://www.southernassembly.ie/regional-planning/rses

9    Kilkenny County Council | Corporate Plan 2024 – 2029:
https://consult.kilkenny.ie/en/consultation/kilkenny-county-council-draft-corporate-plan-2024-%E2%80%93-2029

10   Kilkenny County Council | Kilkenny City and County Development Plan 2021 – 2027:
https://kilkennycoco.ie/eng/services/planning/development-plans/city-and-county-development-plan/adopted-city-and-county-development-plan.html

11   National Broadband Ireland | National Broadband Plan | County Kilkenny Status Lookup:
https://nbi.ie/reps/

12   Government of Ireland | National Planning Framework:
https://www.npf.ie/

13   Government of Ireland | Project Ireland 2040:
https://assets.gov.ie/7335/7692660a70b143cd92b1c65ee892b05c.pdf

14   National Broadband Ireland | National Broadband Plan | Deployment Areas:
https://nbi.ie/deployment-area-rollout-map/

15   Local Enterprise Office | Kilkenny | Grow Digital Programme:
https://www.localenterprise.ie/Kilkenny/Financial-Supports/Grow-Digital/

16   Local Enterprise Office | Kilkenny | Digital for Business
https://www.localenterprise.ie/Kilkenny/Financial-Supports/Digital%20Start/#[object%20Object]

17   Local Government Ireland | Digital Local Government: Working for Everyone:
https://www.lgma.ie/en/what-we-do/programme-management-and-innovation/digital-ict-strategy_2024_2030_web_final-compressed.pdf