

Orbis IT & Digital Review

Background

The Orbis IT & Digital (IT&D) service has been in place since 2016 and has provided stability and cost-effective services as well as achieving substantial cost savings. In practice, whilst the Orbis configuration has been successful in saving cost, it has also reduced IT&D's ability to work closely with service teams to understand their challenges and deliver value adding solutions. Without sufficient digital leadership capacity, it has not been possible for the three partnering authorities to drive forward their digital agendas in support of service improvement and efficiencies.

Given the above, and given changes coming down the line due to Local Government Reorganisation (LGR), the Orbis arrangement has come under increasing strain, and it has been timely to review the function in the context of the changing needs and operating landscape of the partner Councils. The intention of the review has been to understand the future needs and ambitions for each authority to ensure that each authority has access to an IT service that is fit for the future.

Executive Summary

Following the departure of the previous Chief Digital Information Officer (CDIO), an interim CDIO was appointed in order to both ensure service stability and to undertake a review of the Orbis IT & Digital Service. This review was concluded in November 2025 and considered the following operating models:

0. Continue as is
1. Continue in partnership with some key changes
2. Hosted model
3. Sovereign leadership with some sharing of services
4. Fully sovereign (i.e. East Sussex County Council (ESCC) only)

The review also looked at operating models in other authorities and obtained stakeholder and staff survey feedback. The Orbis reviews in general have also provided an opportunity to improve the service quality received by ESCC, as well as to consider the operating model of the functions alongside potential capabilities and needs residing within the district and borough councils.

The first phase of the review concluded that options 0, 1 and 2 could not be taken forward as there was not the necessary consensus from all partners, which would be required under these options.

Options 3 and 4 were therefore taken forward for further, more detailed, consideration. The review concluded that the current shared service arrangements do not enable ESCC to deliver on its strategic priorities or deliver on LGR from an IT&D perspective. It found that a fully sovereign model for IT&D will likely provide the stable 'platform' upon which each of the Councils can build their future IT&D service provision.