Corporate Policy Committee

Date of Meeting:	23 March 2023
Report Title:	ICT Strategy
Report of:	Jane Burns: Executive Director Corporate Services
Report Reference No:	CP/35/22-23
Ward(s) Affected:	All

1. Purpose of Report

1.1. At the meeting on 6 October 2022, the Corporate Policy Committee approved the development of an ICT Strategy for Cheshire East Council, the principles on which the ICT Strategy will be based, and the timeline for that development which enables and underpins many of the digital aims and objectives in the Council's Corporate Plan 2021-25.

1.2. The purpose of this report is to seek approval from the Corporate Policy Committee for the ICT Strategy for Cheshire East Council.

2. Executive Summary

2.1 Maximising the opportunities that the Digital Revolution provides is a priority for the Council, as outlined within the Corporate Plan 2021-25. The plan recognises that "new and emerging technologies are bringing opportunities to rethink how services can be provided. We want to improve connectivity for all our communities and help residents and business to benefit from the convenience and flexibility it can bring." Technology and information are therefore fundamental enablers for future digital business solutions.

2.2 The Covid pandemic brought this into even greater focus. The technological connectivity, skills, activities, and services that were already a priority, are now an everyday necessity for every aspect of most people's daily lives.

2.3 Cheshire East Council has already made strong progress towards its digital priorities however, these have been implemented as a series of individual projects and programmes. Some of these programmes include coproduction and collaboration with our partners. It is therefore recognised that for ICT Services to deliver integrated solutions to the scale, focus and impact required, a cohesive overarching ICT Strategy and action plan had to be developed.

2.4 This ICT Strategy sets out the Council's strategy for Information Communication and Technology (ICT) over the period 2023 to 2027.

2.5 It is recognised that the enabling role of ICT Services is essential and underpins the delivery of many Council's services. ICT is also fundamental to most business change programmes across the organisation. With advancements in technologies over the past 3 years, and as a preferred communication method by our residents, this ICT Strategy aims to ensure that the Council is innovative and progressive, continuing to explore new and better ways that technology can help our residents, staff and members access and use our services, in the ways that are right for them.

3. Recommendation

3.1 To approve the ICT Strategy 2023–27 for Cheshire East Council.

4. Reason for Recommendation

4.1. To enable the strategic aims and objectives in the Council's Corporate Plan to be delivered as they relate to the ICT Strategy 2023–27 for Cheshire East Council.

5. Other Options Considered

5.1. The Council could continue with individual ICT projects and programmes, without a single strategic point of focus. This option is not recommended as there are significant risks of inefficiency through duplication, a lack of business and technical system integration, as well as limitations to our ability to share expertise and best practice.

6. Background

6.1. Over the last two years, a significant amount of progress has been made in the delivery of ICT services including:
- the provision of a stable, compliant, and secure technology platform that met the essential replacement needs of the Council,

- the update of the remaining data centre components, to enable a robust and resilient service connected via reliable local and wide area network services,
- the creation of a contemporary and performing environment migrating viable applications and products to the Cloud, thereby ensuring remote and new ways of working throughout the pandemic,
- access to key applications hosted appropriately and in the most cost-effective manner i.e., on premises or in the cloud,
- the introduction of an improved level of resilience and disaster recovery capability through the delivery of modern infrastructure technology,
- delivery of the necessary tools and processes, which has enabled ICT services to be more efficient and effective in managing the new environments, and
- working in more agile and flexible ways, in line with their ambitions for flexible and mobile working which have been business critical and successful during the pandemic.

6.2. The ICT Strategy 2023-27 provides direction and strategic priorities that will continue to shape the council technology environment. It provides a platform that can exploit innovation in the delivery of new service models, whilst providing a stable and resilient infrastructure which facilitates the most efficient use of resources.

6.3. Whilst the strategy contains broad strategic principles and objectives (along with the rationale behind those objectives), including the benefits and deliverables that will be achieved, it does not set out to provide a strict formula. As an evolving strategy underpinning changing business need, it will enable an agile approach to operational delivery. This will allow the Council to take advantage of technology and digital platforms as they become available and respond quickly to changing times, to better serve our residents, staff, and members in accessing Council services to provide more efficient and economical communication channels.

6.4. This ICT Strategy enables the Council to deliver its Corporate Plan, supporting our Customer Experience (Cx) and Digital Strategy and, providing more 'efficient services' and improving 'the environment.'

6.5. The ICT Services vision states that it will 'Exploit information and technology to deliver change and innovation based on a foundation of secure and flexible ICT Services.' Our vision is to invest in people and technology to improve customer experience, increase digital services, and promote the use of Cloud services to provide resilient and efficient ways of accessing Council services. To create a relationship between people and technology to remove barriers and use technology as an enabler.

6.6. Our ICT Strategy reflects upon the Councils 'Values' and wider supporting strategies to align with the culture at Cheshire East Borough Council. Those key principles are:

- To provide standard, sustainable, and flexible technology
- Ensure ICT governance and architectural practices are sustainable for the future
- Focus on agile delivery, supporting and communicating with the workforce, to maximise the benefits
- Ensure the Council's information and data is managed effectively with enterprise solutions
- Facilitate sharing of information and partnership working
- Maximise the value of technology enabling financial stability
- Provide Cyber Security and Threat Management

7. Consultation and Engagement

7.1. To develop our ICT Strategy, we have engaged with a number of external organisations including Gartner, iESE, Microsoft, Ernst Young, InfoTech, Apptio and Cheshire West and Chester Council. Internally we have collaborated with the Corporate Leadership Team (CLT), Department Management Teams (DMT), Directorate Meetings, Managers, Bright Sparks, and the Information Governance Group (IGG).

7.2. Further consultation with stakeholders, Trade Union and Staff will also inform the development of ICT Services and the strategy at existing and ongoing regular meetings.

8. Implications

8.1. Legal

8.1.1. Adherence with UK GDPR – Article 5(1)(b) states that data shall be collected for specified, explicit and legitimate purposes and not further processed in a manner that is incompatible for those purposes. While enabling users to experience a seamless process, the Council does need to ensure compliance with Article 5(1)(b) if personal data is to be used for a new purpose other than a legal obligation or function set out in law, the Council will need to ensure that this is compatible with the original purpose the data was collected for or obtain consent. Obtaining consent for use for a different purpose can be problematic for a public authority as there is a presumption that consent is not freely given if provision of a service is dependent on the consent, as is the case with service provided by public bodies.

8.1.2. ICT Services continues to work with service-based contract managers to procure ICT contracts and assets on behalf of the Council. The ICT Strategy

will continue to ensure that all legal and procurement procedures are followed to maintain Value for Money (VfM) for the authority.

8.2. Finance

8.2.1. This ICT strategy will ensure information, communications and technology solutions are integrated and co-ordinated. There is no requirement to amend the existing four-year ICT Services capital and revenue budgets, however as annual High Level Business Cases (HLBC's) are updated, amended, or new proposals come forward, then the financial benefits will be assessed, and any changes will be considered as part of the MTFS.

8.2.2. This ICT Strategy will need to take into consideration and refer to ongoing resourcing difficulties, inflationary pressures, and third-party supplier costs when optional solutions are proposed.

8.3. Policy

8.3.1. This ICT Strategy is aligned with the Council's vision, priorities and values as outlined in the Corporate Plan 2021-2025.

8.4. Equality

8.4.1. The fundamental principles in the ICT Strategy ensure that inclusion is at the heart of all proposals.

8.4.2. Adherence with the Equality Act 2010 will be part of the Information, Communications and Technology (ICT) Strategy 2022-26 as consideration must be given to the Public Sector Equality Duty provided for under s.149 of the Equality Act 2010. Public authorities must remove or minimise disadvantage and take steps to meet the needs of persons sharing protected characteristics such as a disability or age. The duty also states that public authorities must encourage persons with a protected characteristic to participate where participation by such persons is disproportionately low.

8.5. Human Resources

8.5.1. This ICT Strategy does recognise the need for the continued upskilling of the workforce and where there are wider HR implications, trade unions and staff consultations will be undertaken appropriately.

8.6. Risk Management

8.6.1. The ICT Strategy will continue to assess full business case risk assessments, particularly with respect to information, cyber security and compliance which are managed and reported through the Strategic Information Governance Group (SIGG) and the Strategic Risk Register quarterly update to Corporate Policy Committee.

8.7. Rural Communities

8.7.1. The fundamental principles proposed in this ICT Strategy will ensure that inclusion is at the heart of all proposals including our rural communities.

8.7.2. ICT Services will continue to coproduce and collaborate with the Cheshire and Merseyside regional connectivity teams, the Local Enterprise Partnership and Connected Cheshire programme at both a Cheshire East Place and at the Cheshire and Merseyside regional level to ensure that the ICT Strategy will meet their integration standards and connectivity needs.

8.8. Children and Young People/Cared for Children

8.8.1. ICT Services will continue to work with the Children's Services Transformation Board and Schools to determine ongoing ICT requirements are included within this ICT Strategy.

8.9. Public Health

8.9.1. ICT Services will continue to work with the Adults Social Care and Public Health Strategic Departmental Management Team to determine ongoing ICT requirements are included within this ICT Strategy.

8.9.2. ICT Services will continue to coproduce and collaborate with Health and Social Care colleagues at both a Cheshire East Place and at the Cheshire and Merseyside regional level to ensure that the ICT Strategy will meet their integration standards and data sharing needs.

8.9.3. ICT Services will also continue to work with North West Adults Directors of Social Care (NW ADASS) colleagues to coproduce and collaborate at a regional level to ensure that the ICT Strategy will meet their integration standards and data sharing needs.

8.10. Climate Change

8.10.1. One of the principles of the ICT Strategy is to "ensure ICT governance and architectural practices are sustainable for the future." This ICT Strategy enables the Council's commitment to be carbon neutral by 2025 and, by adopting Cloud first technology, influence carbon reduction across the ICT estate.

Access to Information	
Contact Officer:	Gareth Pawlett, Head of ICT Services Gareth.pawlett@cheshireeast.gov.uk 01270 686298
Appendices:	ICT Strategy
Background Papers:	Report to 6 October Corporate Policy Committee Decision report template (cheshireeast.gov.uk)