

Corporate Policy Committee

Date of Meeting:	2 nd December 2021
Report Title:	Cheshire East - Digital Strategy
Report of:	Jane Burns: Executive Director Corporate Services
Report Reference No:	CP/19/21-22
Ward(s) Affected:	All

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1.** Maximising the opportunities that the Digital Revolution provides is a priority for the Council as outlined within the Corporate Plan. 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.”
- 1.2.** Cheshire East Council has already made strong progress towards its digital priority however this has developed as a series of individual programmes and collaborations with our partners.
- 1.3.** In September 2001, Corporate Policy Committee approved a recommendation to develop a single overarching Digital Strategy for Cheshire East Council. The proposed themes and principles to be incorporated within the Strategy were also approved.
- 1.4.** The Draft Digital Strategy has now been developed with a proposed overarching digital vision “**To use the power of digital innovation to redesign the Council and the services it provides – making Cheshire East a better place to live and work and for our residents and businesses to thrive**”.
- 1.5.** It is intended to issue the Draft Digital Strategy for formal consultation with a view to bringing a final version of the Strategy to Corporate Policy Committee in March 2022.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1.** It is recommended that Corporate Policy Committee: -
- Approve the Draft Digital Strategy for Cheshire East Council based on the principles and themes approved by Corporate Policy Committee 7th September 2021
 - Agree to a formal consultation on the Draft Digital Strategy
 - Agree that the final Digital Strategy be submitted to Corporate Policy Committee post consultation in March 2022

3. Reasons for Recommendations

- 3.1.** To enable the development of a Digital Strategy for Cheshire East Council and to support the strategic aims and objectives in the Council's Corporate Plan 2021-25.
- 3.2.** To ensure that the Digital Strategy is developed in consultation with our residents, businesses and partners.

4. Other Options Considered

- 4.1.** The Council could continue without a Digital Strategy. This option is not recommended as, without the focus of an overarching Strategy, there are significant risks of inefficiency as well as a limited ability to share expertise and best practice.
- 4.2.** The Council could develop a Digital Strategy in isolation from residents, businesses and partners. This option is not recommended as it would not align with the Council's commitment to openness and transparency. It is also likely to undermine development of the initiatives contained within the Strategy, many of which rely on partnership working.
- 4.3.** The Council could adopt a Digital Strategy without consulting. This option is not recommended as the Council recognises the benefits of public consultation which can help improve strategies and increase public participation and support. Not consulting on this draft strategy would not align with the Council's commitment to openness and transparency.

5. Background

- 5.1.** Cheshire East Council has already made significant progress in its digital journey and has accelerated this as a result of the COVID pandemic. Improvements have been made in our service delivery, in our daily working practices and in our communities.
- 5.2.** The Corporate Plan recognises this but also the need for more to be done to maximise these benefits and to minimise the negative impacts of digital.

- 5.3. The development of a Digital Strategy for Cheshire East Council aims to provide a clear vision for the Councils digital transformation, underpinned by a set of principles against which the existing wide range of activities can be co-ordinated and future initiatives can be assessed.
- 5.4. In September 2021, Corporate Policy Committee approved both the principles on which the Digital Strategy should be based and the themes around which it should be developed. These are now incorporated within the Strategy and have been expanded to articulate a clear vision for each theme, the deliverables which will support the achievement of that vision and the expected outcomes.
- 5.5. A Digital Board has been established chaired by the Director for Finance and Customer Services with representation from Place, Children's, Adults, Customer Experience, and ICT. The Board will co-ordinate the delivery of the Digital Strategy, ensuring all actions are delivered and the anticipated outcomes and benefits are achieved.
- 5.6. The Draft Digital Strategy can be found at Appendix one.

6. Consultation and Engagement

- 6.1. Many of the individual themes within the Strategy have already been subject to consultation (for example the Customer Experience Strategy). The Draft Digital Strategy will however be issued for formal consultation to residents, businesses and partners to ensure it meets their aspirations and represents a cohesive approach to digital transformation.

7. Implications

- 7.1. Equality Act 2010 – when considering the approach to be taken in the Digital Strategy 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 provides that public authorities must encourage persons with a protected characteristic to participate where participation by such persons is disproportionately low.
- 7.2. **UK GDPR** – Article 5(1)(b) 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 customers 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.

- 7.3. Finance** – The Strategy will provide a clear vision for the Councils digital transformation against which the existing wide range of activities can be co-ordinated and future initiatives can be assessed. The governance, associated with implementation of the strategy, will increase opportunities to achieve efficiencies within the medium term. Any changes to the MTFS will be reported and approved in accordance with the Constitution.
- 7.4. Policy** – The proposed principle and themes are aligned with the Councils vision, priorities and values as outlined in the Corporate Plan 2021-2025
- 7.5. Equality** – The fundamental principles underpinning the Strategy ensure that inclusion is at the heart of all digital proposals. A full EIA has been conducted and is attached.
- 7.6. Human Resources** – The Strategy does recognise the need for the continued upskilling of the workforce and a shift in culture towards digital first. There are no wider HR implications.
- 7.7. Risk Management** – The ongoing Digital transformation will be co-ordinated through the corporate Programme Management Office and a full risk assessment will be developed and managed.
- 7.8. Rural Communities** – The fundamental principles underpinning the Strategy ensure that inclusion is at the heart of all digital proposals including our rural communities.
- 7.9. Children and Young People/Cared for Children** – Children and young people are those most digitally included and are most likely to benefit from the digital transformation proposed. Specific actions have also been incorporated within the Strategy to address the issues of safety on-line.
- 7.10. Public Health** – The Digital Strategy theme of Health, Well-being and inclusion specifically considers digital opportunities to improve public health.
- 7.11. Climate Change** – One of the principles of the Strategy is proposed to be “Green Digital” – Our digital transformation will support the Councils commitment to be carbon neutral by 2025 and to influence carbon reduction across the borough.

Access to Information

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Appendices:	Appendix 1 - Draft Digital Strategy Appendix 2 - Equality Impact Assessment
Background Papers:	Developing a Digital Strategy - report final.pdf (cheshireeast.gov.uk)