Corporate Policy Committee

Date of Meeting: 3rd March 2022

Report Title: Cheshire East Digital Strategy

Report of: Jane Burns: Executive Director Corporate Services

Report Reference No: CP/57/21-22

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. In September 2021 a report was submitted to Corporate Policy Committee detailing the progress made towards this digital priority and the challenges of co-ordinating this activity across the Council and with our partners. Corporate Policy Committee approved a recommendation to develop a cohesive overarching Digital Strategy enabling delivery of our digital ambitions at the scale, focus and impact required.

1.2. The report also provided recommendations as to the aims and principles upon which the Strategy should be developed which were approved by Corporate Policy Committee.

1.3. The draft Digital Strategy was subsequently submitted to and approved by Corporate Policy Committee in December 2021, subject to formal consultation. That consultation is now complete, and this report provides details of the outcome and requests approval for the final Digital Strategy for Cheshire East Council.

2. Recommendations

2.1. It is recommended that theCorporate Policy Committee: -

➢ Approve the final Digital Strategy for Cheshire East Council

➢ Approve that further updates are provided to Corporate Policy on progress against the aims of the Strategy on a 6 monthly basis

3. Reasons for Recommendations

3.1. To provide a cohesive Digital Strategy for the Council and our partners in support of the strategic aims and objectives in the Council's Corporate Plan 2021-25.

3.2. To enable better co-ordination of activity and standards, including with our partners, to increase efficiency and promote innovation by providing a focus for activity and appropriate support.

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.
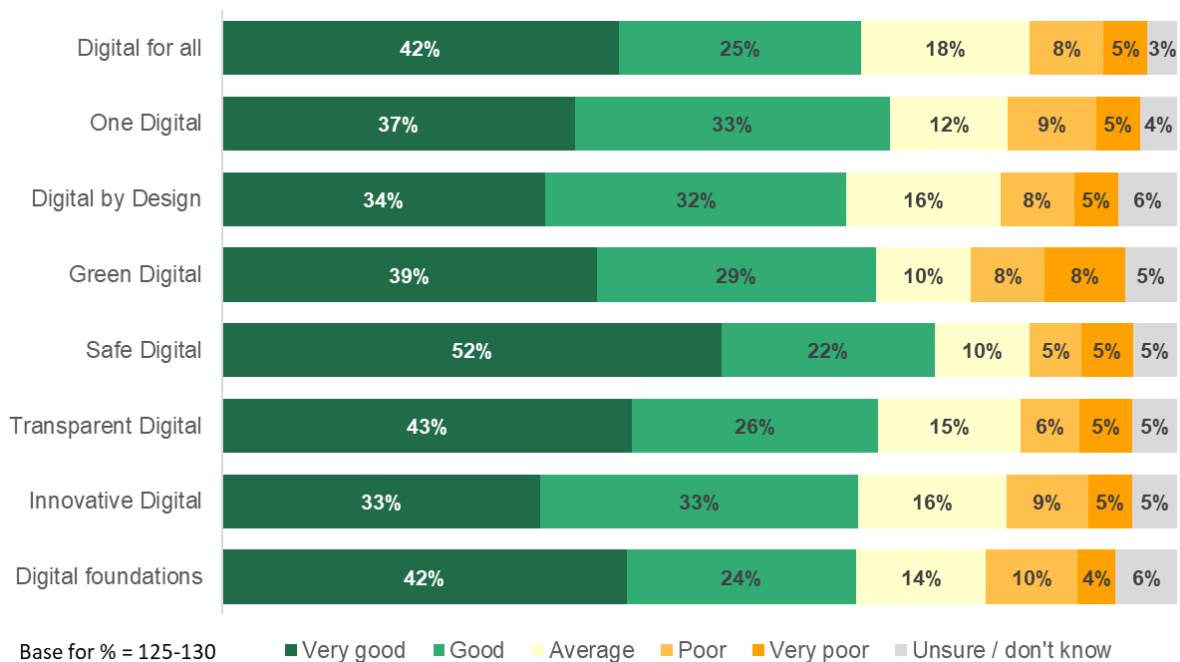
5. Background

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 Council's 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 upon which the Digital Strategy should be based and the themes around which it should be developed. In December 2021, Corporate Policy Committee approved a draft Digital Strategy, subject to formal consultation.

5.5. An officer-level Digital Board has been established chaired by the Director for Finance and Customer Services. 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 Digital Strategy can be found at **Appendix one.**
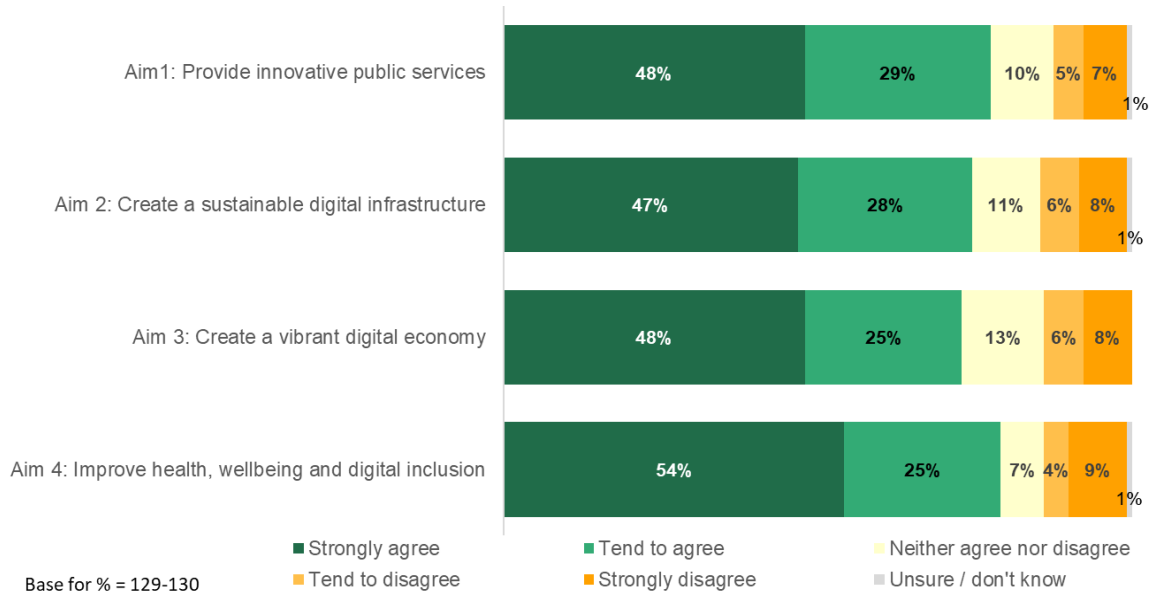
6. Consultation and Engagement

6.1. The draft Digital Strategy was subject to formal consultation between 6 December and 23 January. The consultation was promoted on the Council's website and through press releases, social media, and internal communications. It was issued to the Digital Influence Panel, promoted in our Libraries, and via or Community Co-ordinators. It was shared directly with our partners via the Business Forum and the Digital Inclusion Panel (including representation from Health, Council Voluntary Services and Age UK), with colleagues in Health and Connecting Cheshire and with Senior Managers across the Council engaged in delivering supporting projects or initiatives.

6.2. 179 responses were received with the majority being supportive of the aims, principles and actions contained within the Strategy. A summary of the responses is as follows:-

6.3. **Digital Principles**: Each of the principles were rated as good or very good by the majority of respondents. No additional principles were suggested.

Figure 1: Rating of the principles

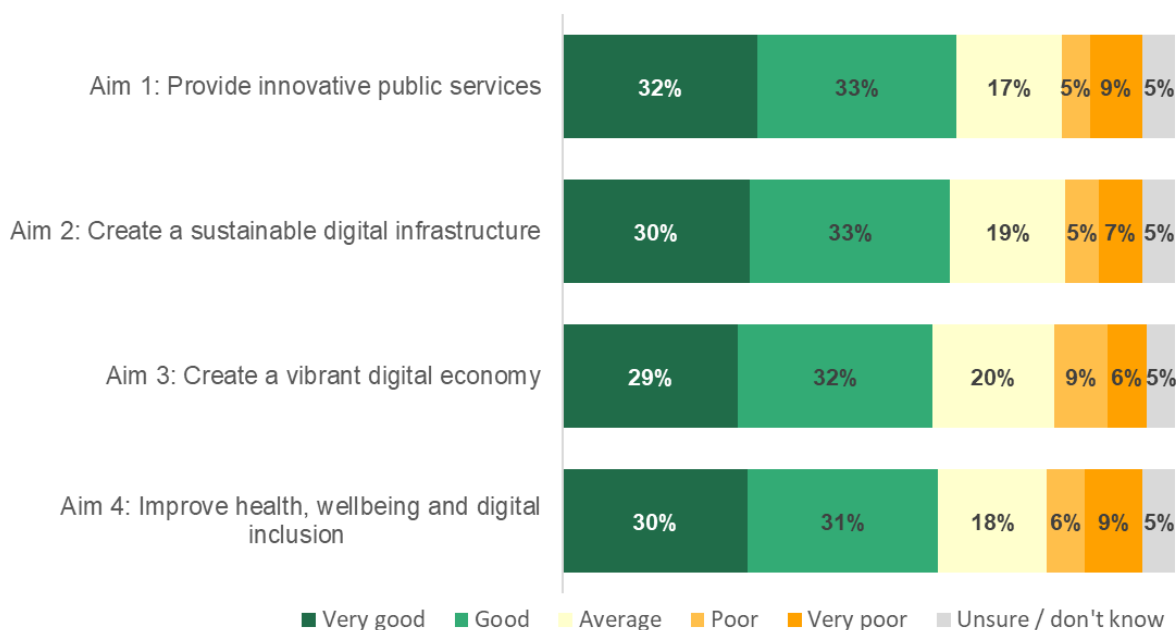| Principle	Very good	Good	Average	Poor	Very poor	Unsure / don't know
Digital for all	42%	25%	18%	8%	5%	3%
One Digital	37%	33%	12%	9%	5%	4%
Digital by Design	34%	32%	16%	8%	5%	6%
Green Digital	39%	29%	10%	8%	8%	5%
Safe Digital	52%	22%	10%	5%	5%	5%
Transparent Digital	43%	26%	15%	6%	5%	5%
Innovative Digital	33%	33%	16%	9%	5%	5%
Digital foundations	42%	24%	14%	10%	4%	6%

Base for % = 125-130

6.4. Digital Aims: There was strong support for the overall aims of the strategy being the right areas to focus on with the majority of respondents strongly agreeing or agreeing.

Figure 2: Agreement / disagreement that the aims were the right areas to focus on within the Cheshire East digital strategy

Base for % = 129-130

Legend:
- Strongly agree
- Tend to agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Tend to disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Unsure / don't know

Chart data:

Aim	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Unsure / don't know
Aim1: Provide innovative public services	48%	29%	10%	5%	7%	1%
Aim 2: Create a sustainable digital infrastructure	47%	28%	11%	6%	8%	1%
Aim 3: Create a vibrant digital economy	48%	25%	13%	6%	8%	
Aim 4: Improve health, wellbeing and digital inclusion	54%	25%	7%	4%	9%	1%

6.5. **Actions:** The actions underpinning each of the themes were rated as good or very good by the majority of respondents.

Figure 3: Rating of each set of actions given under the aims

Aim 1: Provide innovative public services — Very good 32%, Good 33%, Average 17%, Poor 5%, Very poor 9%, Unsure / don't know 5%

Aim 2: Create a sustainable digital infrastructure — Very good 30%, Good 33%, Average 19%, Poor 5%, Very poor 7%, Unsure / don't know 5%

Aim 3: Create a vibrant digital economy — Very good 29%, Good 32%, Average 20%, Poor 9%, Very poor 6%, Unsure / don't know 5%

Aim 4: Improve health, wellbeing and digital inclusion — Very good 30%, Good 31%, Average 18%, Poor 6%, Very poor 9%, Unsure / don't know 5%

Legend: ■ Very good ■ Good ■ Average ■ Poor ■ Very poor ■ Unsure / don't know

Base for % = 126-129

6.6. Several suggestions were made within the responses which have now been incorporated within the Strategy. These included:-

➢ Emphasising the need to make data available to our partners to inform their decision making and to the public to demonstrate our performance

➢ Exploring the potential to utilise our buildings estate to create digitally enabled "pop in" spaces for residents, businesses, or partners

➢ Exploring the use of digital to provide real time public transport data in support of the Council's green agenda

6.7. A consistent theme throughout the consultation feedback was the need to recognise that not everyone is able to or willing to use digital channels and that traditional methods of contact must be maintained. There were also references to those who are less confident with using digital and the need to provide support to set up and access digital technologies especially for the elderly, the young and those in rural areas.

6.8. Whilst both issues were incorporated within the Strategy, they have been given greater emphasis in this final version. The introduction to the Strategy has been redrafted to increase the focus on this and a

specific commitment to maintain and improve non digital methods of support has been incorporated.

6.9. A further theme was a request for more information on how the plans would be delivered, funded, and measured. The final page of the Strategy explains that detailed plans and measures are being developed and this has again been re-iterated within the introduction.

6.10. Finally, a few comments were raised regarding the terminology within the Strategy. This has now been reviewed to ensure "plain English" is used throughout.

7. Implications

7.1. **Legal - 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.

7.2. **Finance** – The Strategy will provide a clear vision for the Council's 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.

7.3. **Policy –** The proposed principle and themes are aligned with the Council's vision, priorities and values as outlined in the Corporate Plan 2021-2025

7.4. **Equality –** The fundamental principles underpinning the Strategy ensure that inclusion is at the heart of all digital proposals. 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. A full EIA has been conducted and is included as background papers.

7.5. 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.

7.6. 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.

7.7. Rural Communities – The fundamental principles underpinning the Strategy ensure that inclusion is at the heart of all digital proposals including our rural communities.

7.8. 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.

7.9. Public Health – The Digital Strategy theme of Health, Well-being and inclusion specifically considers digital opportunities to improve public health.

7.10. 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 One – Digital Strategy
Background Papers:	Digital Strategy Consultation Report EIA Developing a Digital Strategy - report final.pdf (cheshireeast.gov.uk) Digital Strategy - report final.pdf (cheshireeast.gov.uk)

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