Corporate Policy Committee

5 October 2023

Digital Strategy Update

Report of: Alex Thompson, Director Finance and Customer Services

Report Reference No: CP/20/23-24

Ward(s) Affected: All

Purpose of Report

1   This report provides an update on the progress and achievements related to the Council's Digital Strategy 2022-24.

2   Information is also provided on the approach to accelerating the way forward on digital innovation and benefits.

Executive Summary

3   The Council published its Digital Strategy (PDF, 4MB) in March 2022, which set out our digital vision, aims, principles and actions.

4   Our digital vision is 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 supporting our residents and businesses to thrive."

5   The Digital Strategy identified forty-seven digital projects. 17% have been completed or closed, 66% of these projects are on track to deliver as defined and 17% are still required but may need to be reviewed.

6   To keep momentum in the achievement of our strategy the Digital Governance model is being re-visited. the aim is to accelerate digital transformation and proactively supporting Council Services with innovative solutions alongside the financial business planning process and refresh of the corporate plan.

7   These changes will re-shape the Digital Steering Group and set up a Digital Design authority. These two elements will be in place for September 2023 and will evolve over the rest of the year as priorities are identified.

8   As part of the re-shaping initiative, activities are being put in place to accelerate digital delivery.

9   We will also develop a model based on product delivery. This means longer-term focus on the impact and user-benefits of an evolving product. With the changes needed to achieve this being delivered by co-ordinated projects.

10   Driving digital success will require a digital Adoption and Change Management (ACM) approach and committed resources.

11   To maximise the impact of digital transformation the Digital Steering Group will prioritise transformation. To reflect the requirement to achieve financial sustainability the initial focus will be on optimising benefits within services that can reduce expenditure through digital transformation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Corporate Policy Committee is recommended to:

1. Note the progress made in respect to the aims of the Digital Strategy contained within the briefing material in this report and proposals to accelerate digital transformation.
2. Note the re-shaping of the Digital Strategy Board and introduction of a Digital Design Authority, with an initial focus on financial sustainability through digital transformation.


Background

12   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.

13   The Council is committed to using digital technologies to create new value within the service areas by evolving processes, culture, and customer experience to meet changing internal business and external resident and market requirements.

14   Digital solutions will also include enhanced cyber security measures, robust information assurance and data management, reliable connectivity, and integration across the Council.

15   The Digital Platform delivery is ongoing and on target, with accelerated delivery of digital options across Council Services planned to commence during the final quarter of 2023/24 and continue throughout 2024/25.

16   The public sector is standing on the edge of a brave new technological world. Much progress has already been made, but there is still work to be done. The urgent need for change is matched by both desire and ability.

17   In its rapid response to the pandemic, the workforce demonstrated remarkable resilience and agility, almost immediately adapting to embrace new methods and processes. We have emerged into a much-changed world. With innovative technologies advancing at a barely conceivable pace, the opportunities are many.

18   Now is the time to build on the hard-won achievements of recent history, to embrace innovation and to power the public sector forwards, ready to meet the challenges of tomorrow. Improvements have been made in our service delivery, in our daily working practices and in our communities but this needs to accelerate to meet our financial challenges.

19   The Corporate Plan recognises this but also the need for more to be done to maximise benefits and to minimise any negative impacts of digital. In tandem, Digital inclusion is a key priority with a view to securing dedicated resource in the new Digital and ICT Target Operating Model (TOM) going forward.

20   The Digital Strategy 2022-24 for Cheshire East Council provided 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.

21   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.

22 An officer-level Digital Board was established chaired by the Director for Finance and Customer Services. The Board co-ordinated the delivery of the Digital Strategy, ensuring all actions are delivered and the anticipated outcomes and benefits are achieved.

23 A Digital Platform and forty-seven digital projects were identified to deliver the strategy. These projects and their status are listed in Appendix 1.

24 Overall, 66% of these projects are on track to deliver as defined, 17% are still required but may need to be reviewed and 17% have been completed or closed.

25 Provide innovative public services digital projects has 69% on track, 15% needing review and 15% completed or closed.

26 Create a vibrant digital economy has 58% projects on track, 8% needing review and 34% completed or closed.

27 Create a sustainable digital infrastructure has 91% projects on track and 9% needing review.

28 Improve health, wellbeing and inclusion projects has 45% on track, 36% needing review and 18% completed or closed.

29 The Digital Platform is the core component for Cheshire East Council to provide digital services to its customers. Its primary objectives are to provide the framework for continuous transformational change management across Council Services.

30 Platforms depend on service goals; and can include cloud servers, content management systems, robotics, data analytic systems, mixed reality, artificial intelligence, geo-based applications and more. The ICT Digital Programme has recommended configuration of functionality, based on need, whilst maintaining the principles of simplified, standardised and shared.

31 Migrating data from local devices or services to the cloud to improve productivity, the ability of the business to scale, and to reduce data siloes or information bottlenecks within the Council is nearing completion.

32 The delivery of the Digital Platform is ongoing and on target, with core platform capabilities continuing to be enabled during the first nine months of 2023/24. Accelerated delivery of digital options across Council Services is planned to commence during the final quarter of 2023/24 and continue throughout 2024/25.

33   The digital framework provides the capabilities to deliver an enhanced customer experience across services and system enabled business efficiencies, in support of the council's financial challenge objectives.

34   The Digital Governance model is being re-visited in line with changes to personnel and the wider Digital Space to accelerate digital transformation and proactively support end-to end cross directorate digital solutions, challenging and underpinning the financial business planning process.


Digital Governance, Design & Business Planning Relationship Model
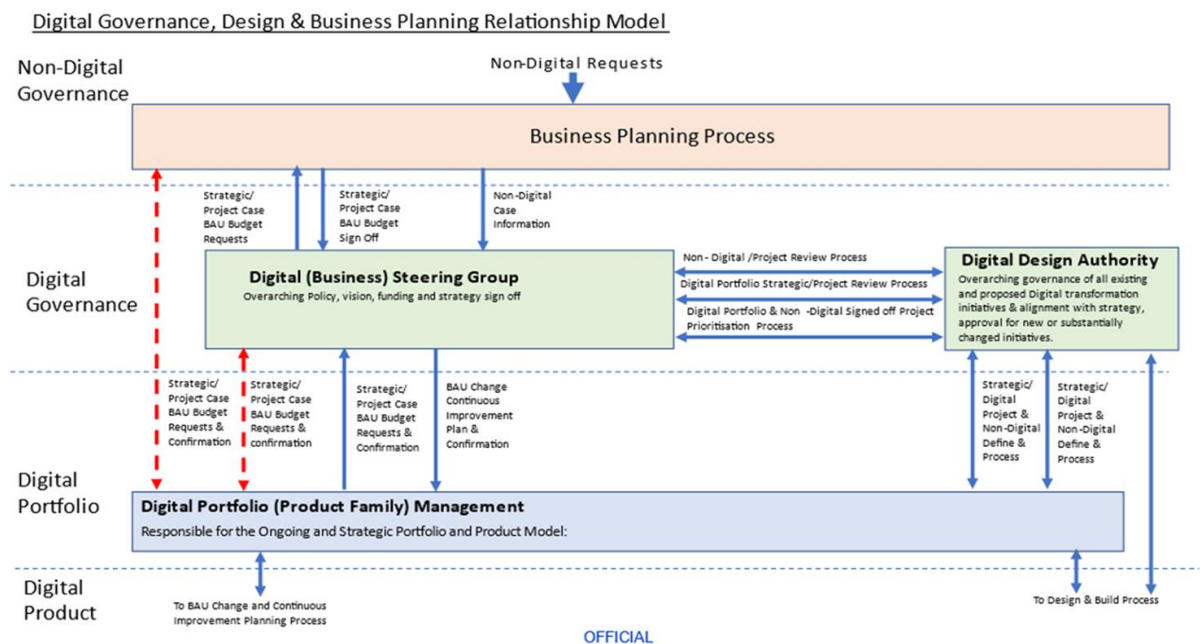
35   It is proposed that this governance model will manage the framework which supports the ongoing digital strategic direction and prioritisation, the co-ordination, funding and sign-off of ongoing digital initiatives and requests.

36   As part of the re-shaping initiative, it is proposed that activities are put in place to accelerate digital delivery. The existing acceleration case will be re-purposed to include analysis, streamlining and alignment of existing/planned deliveries.

37   Consideration is also being given to the development of a model which provides for the movement from a project delivery to a product delivery model, which incorporates agile ways of working and continuous improvement, and acceleration of the use of innovation technologies to support accelerated delivery and benefits.

38   The governance model will incorporate a Digital Steering Group and a Digital Design Authority. It is planned to have these bodies in place on an increasing scope basis through 2023-24.

39   These governance groups will also be supported by both our Gartner and InfoTech specialist partners to widen our understanding of possible digital solutions, ethics and policies, agile developments, products, change management, training, and communications.

40   It is proposed that the Digital (Business) Steering Group will be responsible for governance, strategic direction, and associated policies (AI, Robotics, equality, inclusion, compliance, training, and development etc.), funding and budgets, and project authorisation to progress through to the next stage of the corporate governance process/structure.

41   The work of the Digital (Business) Steering Group incorporates ICT and Digital systems relevant to the delivery of all services across the Council including those ICT systems that are used by our partner organisations and work that links to our "external" Digital Strategy.

42   Services often have poor visibility into the activities of other services, and they may not be aware of the ramifications their decisions have on teams and stakeholders outside of their service. It is proposed that the Digital (Business) Steering Group will focus on end-to-end digital delivery and a proactive communications plan for the Council.

43   Digital (Business) Steering Group will also review the funding model for digital provision for services to make it easier to engage with digital leads. Digital funding currently depends on one-time expenditures or capital-funding mechanisms that are based on building-construction funding models predicated on a life expectancy of 20 years or more. It is recognised that such models do not provide the stability or flexibility needed for modern digital innovative investments.

44   The Digital Steering Group will initially focus on products and services that can achieve significant savings through digital transformation. This approach is likely to support high engagement from services users and residents as well as supporting a sustainable financial model of service delivery.

45   The key purpose of the proposed Digital Design Authority (DDA) is to act as the point of integration, approval and overview of the business architecture, technical architecture and commercial elements that will make up the business solutions (having been approved and prioritised by the Digital (Business) Steering Group) being designed, implemented, and operated by the service areas.

46   The DDA will ensure that development of the solution is in accordance with agreed strategic objectives, design principles, target architecture and target operating model. It provides a holistic overview and to ensure

the individual streams of work are integrated and aligned. The role includes setting the definition of a common design, vocabulary, process and understanding of how the transformation design will be delivered.

47   The DDA reports to the Digital (Business) Steering Group.

48   Proposed timeline

High Level Plan Digital Governance Design Authority & Linkage to Digital Programme's
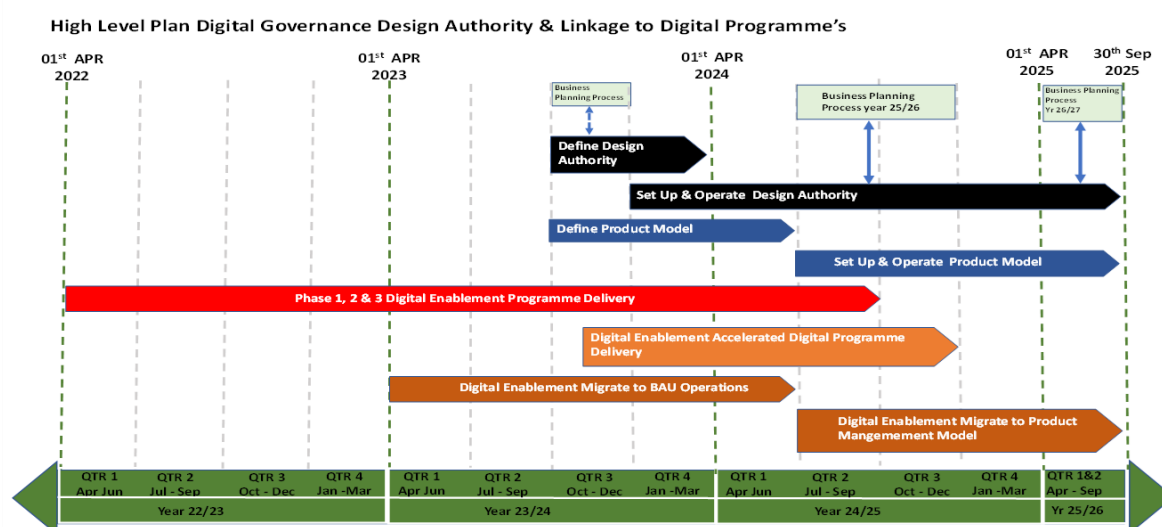
Consultation and Engagement

49   The Digital Strategy was subject to formal consultation between 6th December and 23rd January 2022.

50   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.

Reasons for Recommendations

51   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.

52   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.

Other Options Considered

Option	Impact	Risk
Do nothing	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.	• Poor reputation • Rise in complaints • Inefficient processes leading to higher costs. • Vulnerable customers not identified and supported

Implications and Comments

Monitoring Officer/Legal

53   Council needs to comply with all Data Protection principles and policy. Consent is unlikely to be required, even if the secondary use of personal data is different to the original purpose, particularly when it is likely to be for an official function of the local authority. An important principle is 5(1)(a) - processed lawfully, fairly and in a transparent manner in relation to the data subject ('lawfulness, fairness and transparency'). This means that appropriate privacy notices must be in place which clearly define what personal data will be used for, where it comes from and who it is shared with. Informing data subjects and having a clear basis in law to process is key to compliance with UK GDPR and DPA 2018.

54   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.

Section 151 Officer/Finance

55   The Strategy provides 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.

56   Any changes to the MTFS will be reported and approved in accordance with the Constitution. In most cases this will be presented as a service-based business case that articulates the user and resident benefits and potential financial savings associated with digital transformation.

Policy

57   The principle and themes are aligned with the Council's vision, priorities and values as outlined in the Corporate Plan 2021-2025

58   The Digital Strategy directly supports the aims of:
       (i)   An open and enabling organisation.
              1.   Listen, learn, and respond to our residents, promoting opportunities for a two-way conversation.
              2.   Support a sustainable financial future for the council, through service development, improvement, and transformation.
              3.   Support and develop our workforce to be confident, motivated, innovative, resilient, and empowered.
              4.   Promote and develop the services of the council through regular communication and engagement with all residents.
       (ii)   A Council which empowers and cares about people, working together with residents and partners, and
       (iii) A thriving and sustainable place.

Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion

59   The fundamental principles underpinning the Strategy ensure that inclusion is at the heart of all digital proposals.

60   Consideration was given to the Public Sector Equality Duty provided for under s.149 of the Equality Act 2010. It is recognised that we 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 was conducted.

61   The Digital Strategy aims to improve the experience of all customers when interacting with the Council and ensures that the Council

recognises and addresses individual needs and/or barriers to accessing services.

62   Consideration is being given to securing a dedicated Digital Inclusion resource in the new Digital and ICT Target Operating Model (TOM) going forward.

Human Resources

63   Business process transformation will change how the services function, aiming to increase efficiency and reduce cost, by using information and technology to help staff perform tasks, gather data, and deliver smarter business decisions.

64   Cultural transformation is also required. The art of taking a typically traditional business and highly linear workforce and giving them the technology tools to work as a digital and flexible Council (with partners) through collaboration, data sharing and setting continuous innovation goals.

65   The Strategy therefore recognised the need for the continued upskilling of the workforce and a shift in culture towards digital first. Bright Sparks need to be included and encouraged to propose and develop innovative solutions.

66   ICT Services is currently reviewing its structure because of the split of ICT Shared Services from Cheshire West and Chester Council and the transfer of digital services.

67   The new Digital and ICT Target Operating Model (TOM) will look to identify resources and the right talent to underpin the development of, and operating of, digital Council services going forward.

68   Driving digital adoption will require a digital Adoption and Change Management (ACM) approach and committed resources. Both the Workforce Development and Communications teams will be key to this approach.

69   Tackling change management resistance needs to be a key part of any new deployment. Having a plan in place for this right from the start will help ensure employees are ready for what is coming, understand why it is happening and know what will be required of them.

70   The ultimate cost of the poor handling of adoption and change management is the failure of the digital strategy and the expected benefits.

Risk Management

71   Ongoing Digital transformation will be co-ordinated through Digital and ICT Services.

72   Training and development of the Corporate Programme Management Office, to support agile developments and products, will be actioned.

73   It is proposed that risks will be managed by the Programme (theme or Product) leads, assessed by the Digital Design Authority, with any escalations reported to the Digital Steering Group as required.

Rural Communities

74   The Customer Experience Strategy commits us to recognising the individual needs of all customers and communities which includes the specific needs of rural communities particularly in respect of access to digital technologies.

Children and Young People including Cared for Children, care leavers and Children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)

75   There are no direct implications for Children and Young People arising from this report.

Public Health

76   There are no direct implications for public health arising from this report.

Climate Change

77   There are no direct implications for climate change arising from this report.

Access to Information	
Contact Officer:	Gareth Pawlett – CIO and Head of ICT Services Gareth.Pawlett@CheshireEast.gov.uk
Appendices:	Digital Project Status
Background Papers:	Digital Strategy (PDF, 4MB)