

EXECUTIVE BOARD DECISION



REPORT OF: Executive Member for Digital and Customer Services

LEAD OFFICERS: Strategic Director of Resources (SIRO)

DATE: Thursday, 8 April 2021

PORTFOLIO(S) AFFECTED: Digital and Customer Services

WARD/S AFFECTED: (All Wards);

KEY DECISION: Y

SUBJECT:

Digital Strategy 2021 - 2024

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Council's latest Digital Strategy (2021 – 2024) outlines the vision and objectives for digitisation across our services, the borough and our residents. Our vision sets out an approach to enabling digitisation across the borough for our people, creating the conditions for a high performing Council organisation and providing the best experience to our customers. The strategy details four work streams and outlines a roadmap and strategic investment plan in order for us to deliver on our vision. Implementing the strategy will enable the Council to deliver simple and effective online services, to utilise data insights and to continually improve what we do by deploying the right infrastructure, tools and skills for our workforce.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Executive Board approves the Council's new Digital Strategy.

3. BACKGROUND

We have an advanced starting point after delivering on our previous digital strategy (2018-2020), implementing a new Customer Portal, equipping our workforce with mobile computing, strengthening our IT infrastructure and beginning a move to the Cloud for our key systems. COVID has provided us many challenges but also presented opportunities, particularly around increasing the pace of digitally enabled change.

The channels that customers utilise to interact with the Council are changing. In 2020 the use of online chat with our customers has doubled to over 14,000 interactions and our website, which was re-designed in 2019, now regularly has over 130,000 visits per month. We have over 34,000 customers signed up and using our new Digital Customer Portal, with over 11,000 forms received per month during COVID. These shifts have resulted in reductions in both emails and phone calls to our customer services teams, compared to the previous year. By continuing this shift to online services, we can dedicate valuable face-to-face and phone support to those that really need it.

Since the Council signed up to the Local Government Digital Declaration in February 2019 we have embarked on the reshaping of our teams and the way we design our services to residents. By employing modern approaches, we have put customer research at the heart of what we do. The new strategy sets out how these new approaches will drive continual improvement and transformation.

Our new strategy sets out how we will increase the use of data and insights across the Council. We have introduced systems to visualise complex data, which has aided decision making throughout COVID. Implementing the strategy will mean more integration of the data we use, less duplication and improved forecasting for key services.

The back-end infrastructure that supports the computing environment is critical to the effective running of Council services. The strategy sets out a continued approach to move more of our systems into the Cloud, reducing the need for local infrastructure. Our aim is to increase the security, reliability and total cost of ownership of the IT estate. A number of Local Authorities have suffered from high-profile cyber-attacks, in some cases it has taken organisations a period of months to return to business as usual. It is therefore critical that we continue to support and invest in the right IT infrastructure for BwD.

4. KEY ISSUES & RISKS

The path of digitisation in the Council is well established and if we do not continue to evolve our approach and invest in new technologies this would represent a real risk to Council services.

We will need to manage and mitigate risks around people without access to digital by coordinating our assisted digital and education programmes as well as designing services for everyone, not just those already digitally enabled.

Risks around service continuity will need to be managed as we embark on increased levels of technology-enabled change. Robust implementation planning and agile delivery methods are in place to mitigate this risk.

We must ensure that we are at the forefront of the opportunities offered by technology, to ensure that we are efficient and effective as a Council and to support sustainable budgets in the years to come.

5. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The strategy is a core part of delivering the Council's Corporate Plan and plays an enabling role in business plans to deliver services across the Council.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Detailed business cases with costings will be developed for approval within each work stream throughout the duration of the strategy, followed by published Executive Member and Officer Decisions where relevant. Some schemes are already progressing using existing or previously allocated funding. We will fund new schemes through cost savings, digital revenue reserves, existing revenue, capital bids and external funding bids.

Estimated costs by work stream across the next 4 years are;

Work stream 1 Digital First for our Services : £3.5m capital, £0.5m revenue

Work stream 2 Enable transformation for our staff : £1.5m capital, £2m revenue

Work stream 3 Data driven organisation : £0.3m capital, £0.7m revenue

Work stream 4 Secure and resilient technology : £2m capital, £1m revenue

We will need to develop long-term financial plans that reflect the changing landscape of technology goods and services, which is shifting from a traditional capital model to a revenue based market.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

Supporting procurement processes shall be in accordance with relevant regulations and the Council's Contract Procurement Procedure Rules.

All new contracts will be in a form approved by legal officers in the Commissioning and Procurement team.

8. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

Implementing the strategy will require increased resources within our digital and transformation teams, which is included in the estimates in section 6. Services across the Council will continue to collaborate with core digital teams to deliver transformation. Increasing digital skills across the majority of roles in the Council will be a key part of our delivery.

9. EQUALITY AND HEALTH IMPLICATIONS

Please select one of the options below.

Option 1 Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) not required – the EIA checklist has been completed.

Option 2 In determining this matter the Executive Member needs to consider the EIA associated with this item in advance of making the decision.

Option 3 In determining this matter the Executive Board Members need to consider the EIA associated with this item in advance of making the decision.

10. CONSULTATIONS

The digital strategy has engaged many individuals and groups including Digital & Customer Services teams, Finance, Trade Unions, Digital Inclusion groups, Policy & Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Corporate Leadership Team. A public launch will be planned for spring/summer 2021 to engage the local population. The strategy will be iterative and dynamic, adapting to the continual engagement that takes place.

11. STATEMENT OF COMPLIANCE

The recommendations are made further to advice from the Monitoring Officer and the Section 151 Officer has confirmed that they do not incur unlawful expenditure. They are also compliant with equality legislation and an equality analysis and impact assessment has been considered. The recommendations reflect the core principles of good governance set out in the Council's Code of Corporate Governance.

12. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

All Declarations of Interest of any Executive Member consulted and note of any dispensation granted by the Chief Executive will be recorded in the Summary of Decisions published on the day following the meeting.

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DATE:	23/03/2021

**BACKGROUND
PAPER:**

Digital Strategy 2021 – 2024. Executive Board Overview.