Herefordshire Council

Title of report: IT Strategy Renewal (Digital, Data and Technology Strategy)

Decision maker: Cabinet member Finance and Corporate Services

Decision date: Monday 4th March 2024

Classification

Open

Decision type

Key

This is a key decision because it is likely to be significant having regard to: the strategic nature of the decision; and / or whether the outcome will have an impact, for better or worse, on the amenity of the community or quality of service provided by the authority to a significant number of people living or working in the locality (two or more wards) affected.

Notice has been served in accordance with Part 3, Section 9 (Publicity in Connection with Key Decisions) of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012.

Wards affected

(All Wards);

Purpose

To agree the renewed digital strategy, which has been expanded into a Digital, Data and Technology Strategy (DDaT). The strategy outlines the approach and key activity that supports the work of the council, assists people accessing council services, creates efficiencies and keeps the organisation operational and safe.

Recommendation(s)

That:

a) **The Cabinet Member for Cabinet member Finance and Corporate Services the Digital, Data and Technology Strategy as outlined in appendix 1.**

b) **The Cabinet Member Finance and Corporate Services delegates authority to the Director of Resources and Assurance to take all operational decisions as set out in paragraph 23 to implement and deliver the Digital, Data and Technology Strategy.**

Alternative options

1.   That the strategy is not adopted. The council is not obliged to produce a Digital, Data and Technology Strategy, however the document outlines the reasons, rationale, work programmes and priorities to create a joined up and corporate approach to IT delivery across Herefordshire Council, with support from Hoople Ltd. Therefore it is recommended that the Digital, Data and Technology Strategy is adopted.

2.   That the Digital, Data and Technology Strategy has different priorities. This is not recommended. The strategy has been compiled following consultation and discussion with relevant parties to identify the council's future priorities and needs.

Key considerations

3.   The five year Digital Strategy approved in 2018 has been reviewed and refreshed, as reflected in the attached document, maintaining the direction of delivery within Herefordshire Council to support the implementation of the corporate plan priorities.

4.   Digital Strategy 2018-23 was published in July 2018 contained the principles outlined below:

   a)   Digital by default;

   b)   One Council, One Herefordshire;

   c)   Data Centre first;

   d)   Standards and data sharing;

   e)   Innovative and agile;

   f)   Business continuity.

5.   The new strategy reflects the importance of digital, data and technology to organisational service delivery, and in particular as an enabler which underpins the delivery of other strategies across the organisation.

6.   Digital transformation plays a key role in creating a local authority of the future. Increased and improved use of technology can help evolve public services and meet the needs of communities more effectively and efficiently. The strategy outlines how the council will make the most of digital, data and technology to deliver services.

7.   In order to achieve its full potential, we must increase our capacity to support an ambitious programme, with investment in Hoople Ltd and development of the Digital, Data and Technology Strategy.

8.   The new strategy reflects that digital, data and technology services are critically important organisational assets, which need proactive management to maximise value for residents and operation of the council. Digital services operate in a fast-pace environment. Advances in technology help create efficient services and respond to growing customer expectation in accessing services through technology. With this increased utilisation comes heightened risk of abuse through cyber-attacks and IT data breaches that the Council needs to mitigate against.

9.   The strategy identifies what successful outcomes will look like for Herefordshire Council by 2028. A modern council that will:

   a)   Use the latest digital and technical capabilities to produce improved outcomes alongside a better customer experience and offers its communities 24/7 access to

certain services. Will be an advocate and an early adopter of the latest technology and products, with the latest versions of software running on modern platforms to serve our citizens and communities.

b) Will be an advocate and an early adopter of the latest technology and products, with the latest versions of software running on modern platforms to serve our citizens and communities. Be a proactive communicator who will fully utilise opportunities to update our residents instantly via text, and WhatsApp messages alongside traditional digital channels such as emails and our social media platforms.

c) Result in a reduction in telephone contact due to improved digitalised services and on the occasions when a failure needs to be reported, most will opt to use one of our digital channels instead. Achieve savings through digitalisation and on the renewal and reduction of ICT contracts.

d) Host data in a modernised manner (on Cloud).

e) Achieve savings through digitalisation and on the renewal and reduction of ICT contracts. Drives drive efficiencies and public service transformation through the innovative use of data.

f) Be a proactive communicator who will fully utilise opportunities to update our residents through instant messaging alongside traditional digital channels such as emails and our social media platforms.

g) Provide efficiencies in both front and back office process by utilising AI.

h) Use the data held to make accurate and up-to-date decision making to improve how we commission and deliver services to our community.

i) Drive efficiencies and public service transformation through the innovative use of data.

10. The strategy will act as an enabler for digital, data and technology 'business as usual', and for projects within the council, which are managed and overseen as part of the IT and Partnership Transformation Board, which is chaired by the Director for Resources and Assurance, and serviced by colleagues from across Herefordshire Council and Hoople Ltd.

11. Any procurement activity required to deliver the strategy will follow Council Procedure Rules and legislation in place at the time.

12. Detailed decisions on the delivery of specific elements of the strategy will be subject to the decision making process of the council, including cabinet member decisions. The strategy includes a set of outputs which will measure the success of the strategy, reporting progress annually and via the performance reporting process.

13. The strategy itself is primarily an internal document setting out the strategic objectives for digital, data and technology delivery by the council. Due to the nature of the activity outlined in the strategy, changes in services will be communicated through usual internal routes via communications updates, and team meetings / briefings. Activities affecting communities, specifically digital interaction, will be outlined to customers in advance of change of service depending on the nature of the activity.

Community impact

9. The Digital, Data and Technology Strategy supports the delivery of the council's overarching County Plan 2024-28, and has important links to the council's Customer Service Strategy, Workforce Strategy, Finance Strategy, and is a key enabler for the whole Council Thrive Transformation Plan.

10. Whilst the strategy does not have a direct effect on the lives of children in care, care leavers, or care experienced children and young people, some programmes of work support this area of council service delivery, and digital, data and technology opportunities to support this work are key.

11. Delivery of the strategy must take into account digital exclusion. As identified on Understanding Herefordshire (Digital exclusion - Understanding Herefordshire), digital exclusion is the inability to access online products or services, or to use simple forms of digital technology. The main factors that influence the risk of digital exclusion in the UK are age, geographical location, socioeconomic status and whether a person has a disability.

12. The proportion of adults in Herefordshire who are either lapsed or non-internet users has declined in recent years, in line with the trend nationally. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) estimate that around 17,000 adults (age 16+) in Herefordshire do not use the internet.

13. The 2023 community wellbeing survey identified that 41% of Herefordshire adults are positive about more things being provided online - a 17% point decrease since 2021 (58%). 35% are now concerned about more things being provided online: an increase of 13% points from 2021 and the proportion is higher amongst those aged 55+ (46%), the economically inactive (44% - likely driven by age), people with no formal educational qualifications (43%), those with a disability (43%) or those who receive care (43%), and those who do not use the internet regularly (54%).

14. The implementation of the Digital, Data and Technology Strategy will therefore take into account those who are digitally excluded by ensuring that for any service delivery which is digitalised, alternative non-digital access will remain available. Staff time will be released to enable them to assist customers who need this support, whilst digitally enabled customers will be directed to use digitalised / automated services; this should result in a better customer experience for all users.

Environmental Impact

15. Whilst this is a decision on back office functions and will have minimal environmental impacts, consideration has been made to minimise waste and resource use in line with the Council's Environmental Policy. Where processes still utilise paper forms, part of the transformation of services will look for digital and technology solutions to reduce waste.

16. Use of a cloud first approach wherever feasible and economic will enable environmental benefits, such as reduction in CO_2 emissions and a decrease in electrical consumption. This will also contribute to a reduction in physical hardware, decreasing the need for disposal of servers and equipment.

Equality duty

17.   Under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, the 'general duty' on public authorities is set out as follows:

A public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to –

a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;

b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;

c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

18.   The public sector equality duty (specific duty) requires the council to consider how we can positively contribute to the advancement of equality and good relations, and demonstrate that we are paying 'due regard' in our decision making in the design of policies and in the delivery of services. Though digital, data and technology is largely a back office function there are some implications for customers / users of service, specifically when interacting with the council and those channels are facilitated by digital and technology solutions e.g. web forms, voice automation.

19.   In terms of the protected characteristics the most significant impact is on "age" where older residents are less likely to be internet users which could contribute to digital exclusion.

20.   In terms of mitigation, though there is a drive for services and contact on-line, people without internet access can still access support via face to face or phone contact.

21.   Accessibility of our internal systems is of great importance so that disabled employees are not disadvantaged. All specifications for new or improved systems will include the highest level of accessibility as standard, and proposed technology will be road tested by employees prior to sign-off.

Resource implications

22.   The recommendation of this report has no direct financial implications. Each individual project will detail the budget available as part of their individual decision papers, which will include the resource to deliver the schemes and any impact on the future revenue budget where capital schemes are delivered.

23.   Key areas for investment to meet the objectives of the strategy include:

a. digital factory – the term 'digital factory refers to when processes and methodology that a department currently uses are reviewed. These are then modernised using digital technology, sometimes for a trial period. If the changes lead to efficiencies being made, these will then be introduced into other areas of the council.

b. software programmes

c. hardware replacement

d.   web forms, websites, voice automation, repetitive process automation, chatbots

24.   Other digital, data and technology opportunities will be identified throughout the implementation of this strategy and evolution of the transformation programme.

25.   Implementation of the strategy will result in saving opportunities and each project will consider a review of utilisation of resources, and whether staff time can be released to assist customers and deliver council services.

Legal implications

26.   There are no direct legal implications arising from the recommendation in this report.

Risk management

27.   Risks are outlined below:

Risk / opportunity	Mitigation
Available resource to meet the needs of the strategy.	Use of existing resource will be utilised where possible. Revenue and capital budgets will be used to meet objectives, and additional funding sourced for initiatives outside of the core allocations. Invest to save opportunities will also need to be explored as part of implementation.
Technical capability to meet the needs of the strategy.	Additional investment / third parties may have to be used where technical capability does not exist in house or within existing partnership arrangements. Revenue and capital budgets will be used to meet objectives, and additional funding sourced for initiatives outside of the core allocations.
Changing nature of technology means the strategy becomes out of date.	The strategy provides a framework for digital, data and technology implementation and usage across Herefordshire council. It allows for operational change and development, and will be regularly reviewed and updated.
Ensuring the delivery of the strategy.	The activity is monitored through performance framework process; formal decision made through the council's governance process.

Consultees

28.   The principles of the strategy were outlined to the council's leadership group on 25 October 2023. This group is attended by leaders across the organisation comprising the council's chief executive, corporate directors, delivery directors, heads of service and service leads. The group was asked to comment on the following questions: what opportunities do you see that

we can take with digital, data and technology over the next three years?; what works well and doesn't work so well currently; how can we improve our services to residents by utilising digital, data and technology.

29. Political groups were consulted on 12th February 2024. The following comments were noted:

    a. We must recognise that Herefordshire's has an older population, as well as the lack of internet coverage in many areas of the county. When implementing the strategy, new technology which is introduced for residents must be as simple as possible for the end user to navigate otherwise the benefits will not be realised.

    b. In addition to exploring new opportunities, we need to review and improve existing digital and telephony channels.

    c. Digital transformation is not enough in itself; changes in the underpinning processes are also needed.

    d. In our planning, we need to ensure that people come first, and that we are working as a people-first organisation where digital is there to support and improve the lives of residents, councillors and staff.

    e. Digital transformation needs to take into account the savings that need to be achieved, and not make services more expensive.

    f. Engagement with residents and training for councillors and staff were noted as key to successful implementation and to achieving the identified benefits.

30. The above feedback will be incorporated into the strategy, where appropriate, or as part of implementation and delivery of the strategy and identified pilots and projects.

Appendices

Digital, Data and Technology Strategy 2024-28

Background papers

None identified

Report Reviewers Used for appraising this report:

Please note this section must be completed before the report can be published		
Governance	John Coleman	Date 30/11/2023
Finance	Judith Tramner	Date 29/11/2023
	Karen Morris	Date 01/12/2023
Legal	Emma-Jane Brewerton	Date 29/11/2023
Communications	Luenne Featherstone	Date 30/11/2023
Equality Duty	Harriet Yellin	Date 24/11/2023
Procurement	Lee Robertson	Date 24/11/2023

Risk	Kevin Lloyd	Date 24/11/2023

Approved by	Andrew Lovegrove	Date 14/02/2024

Please include a glossary of terms, abbreviations and acronyms used in this report.

DDaT – Digital, Data and Technology