

**Record of a Scrutiny Session held remotely on Monday 31 January 2022,  
6.30pm – 7.46pm  
“Developing a Digital Strategy for South Warwickshire”**

Introduction

In December 2021, a report titled “Developing a Digital Strategy for South Warwickshire” was considered by the Council’s Cabinet. Overview & Scrutiny Committee called the report in for scrutiny and one of the recommendations made by the Committee was that its members should hold a dedicated session to scrutinise this report in more depth. With this aim, an informal meeting was called on 31 January 2022, to be held remotely and chaired by Councillor Milton. The meeting was streamed to YouTube for transparency and to allow members of the public to listen to questions asked on the report and to the answers given. Any suggested actions or recommendations arising from the meeting would be taken for consideration to the next scheduled public meeting of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee on Tuesday 8 February.

Recommendations for Overview & Scrutiny Committee to consider on 8 February 2022

To ensure that the project be properly scrutinised:

- (1) the Chair, Overview & Scrutiny Committee, the Portfolio Holder – Transformation & Resources and the Head of ICT liaise to agree the key points in the project when a report should come to Overview & Scrutiny Committee for scrutiny; and
- (2) the Head of ICT to provide regular project updates to the Committee.

Present at the Scrutiny Session

Members of Overview & Scrutiny Committee – Councillors Cullinan, \*Jacques, Kohler, \*Leigh-Hunt, Margrave, Milton, Redford, and Russell. (\* Late arrivals.)  
Councillors A Dearing and J Dearing had sent apologies for absence.

Councillor Hales, Portfolio Holder – Transformation & Resources  
Councillor Day – Leader of the Council

Officers – David Elkington – Head of ICT, Lesley Dury – Principal Committee Services Officer, and Kris Walton – Digital Content & Social Media Officer.

A summary of the discussion at the Scrutiny Session

In response to questions from Members, the Head of ICT, the Portfolio Holder – Transformation and Resources and the Leader of the Council, explained that:

- (1) Irrespective of the decision the Secretary of State made, both Councils had approved the principle of shared services. The medium-term financial strategy meant that savings had to be made and the digital strategy was part of this, so would go ahead. It was confirmed that even if the merger was refused by the Secretary of State, the Digital Strategy would still be implemented and deliver its benefits.
- (2) The final elements of the Strategy document (originally circulated as an appendix to the report in December) are nearing completion. Statistics will be

updated before it is published and information that had been shown as “to follow” can now be completed on the basis of the feedback provided by Overview & Scrutiny at the current meeting.

- (3) Work has already commenced on key elements of the changes described in the digital strategy:
  - Creation of a dedicated Digital Team within ICT as part of the restructure of ICT. The Digital Team will include a project manager and business analyst as outlined in the recommendations in the report;
  - Evaluation of Customer Relationship Management Systems (this will be required irrespective of whether the Digital Strategy is adopted);
  - Joint working with SDC’s Insight Team is also underway to consider how the public may respond to accessing services via digital means and what the potential barriers are so that systems can be tailored.
- (4) Identification of the various systems used by both Councils has almost been completed. Systems will be listed by Service Area and details of contract expiry dates, notice periods, and associated costs will be included to get a full picture for both Authorities. Systems scheduled for subsequent replacement or redesign are also being considered to take account of contracts ending (the complexity of some of the systems and the work involved in replacement may otherwise not be feasible before contract end dates).
- (5) Governance of the digital transformation programme will be through the existing WDC Transformation Steering Group which was recently extended to include SDC Heads of Service. In addition, the Joint Management Team (JMT) will consider any major projects and Cabinet expenditure approval will be required in line with existing financial approval processes. Oversight will be through the Joint Arrangements Steering Group (JASG). It is recognised as essential to have comprehensive Member engagement to represent the views of all residents, encourage take up of services and to champion the overall goal of improving services (regardless of communication channel). A lessons-learned from the implementation of the Financial system will be carried out shortly to inform effective options for such Member engagement.
- (6) Proper planning and project management will be critical to avoiding issues of the type previously encountered as a result of a failure to align communications to residents with the necessary information on the Council’s website and the readiness of back-office systems. Councillor Cullinan cited a recent initiative where residents had been asked to indicate which refuse bins they required but the link on the Council’s website did not work and the Christmas holiday period meant that staff were not available. As a result, the Council was forced to extend the deadline for responses.
- (7) To mitigate the current situation where telephone enquiries to Service Areas are not responded to in a timely manner, it is proposed to establish a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system, as a core component of the Digital Strategy. Alongside an improved call distribution platform, it is expected that this approach will minimise residents and others being unable to contact the Council by telephone and being forced to leave voicemail messages. Customer Services staff may also be able to deal with calls more efficiently and will have access to the information provided by those residents who had engaged digitally with the Council. This will allow residents to choose how they wish to communicate with the Council, both on different subjects and at different points in time. Customer Service Staff could also have access to the relevant information held on Council systems to allow most enquiries to be dealt with at first point of contact.

- (8) The Council’s current website holds over 140 forms which residents can complete for various enquiries. The majority simply generate an email to the relevant Service Area, making it difficult for staff to help residents who wish to chase their enquiry. It is expected that such issues could be addressed by a combination of changes to the Council’s website and the Customer Relationship Management System. Options around this are currently being assessed by the Council.
- (9) Harmonisation and update of the two Councils’ websites has been proposed. It is important to understand the needs of the people using the website and the way they expect information to be presented, e.g., via a smartphone, where the current approach of pdf forms would be ineffective.
- (10) Redesign of the website will be based on the design standards already specified by Government Digital Services.
- (11) Contract clauses for off-boarding Council data in suitable formats will be mandated in future systems, to facilitate potential platform moves where improved solutions are available from alternate suppliers.
- (12) Whilst most digital services could be provided without requiring a resident to logon, simply to provide relevant information (e.g., the address where bins have not been collected), other services would require a secure individual logon. It is intended that such logons would be common across all Council services wherever possible.
- (13) In line with normal practice, ICT will engage with their internal and external customers (for example, Licensing staff and taxi drivers and operators when considering a new system for Licensing & Regulatory) to establish specific requirements for new or redesigned systems with the targets of enhancing customer experience and increasing efficiency.
- (14) In terms of data security, transition to Cloud based services could improve our resilience. Many of the organisations the Council are hoping to work with have invested significant funds and resources in implementing continuous security operations which the Council and its residents can benefit from. The harmonisation of the two Councils’ systems is an ideal opportunity to both upgrade current data security arrangements and to further embed security into all of the Council’s systems and operations.
- (15) Reporting requirements and delivery mechanisms will be key considerations when redesigning systems.
- (16) In redesigning or transitioning systems, it will be crucial to map the data held in existing systems and the purposes it is used for. Accordingly, members of staff within each Service Area will be approached to gain this understanding. Extraction of data from existing systems will be facilitated by ICT staff, however it is recognised that support from suppliers may be required for some legacy applications. Migration of the data to the new system will require support from Service Areas to map data to appropriate target destinations in the new systems. ICT will perform any data transformation that may be required for this migration if appropriate and possible.
- (17) Strong project management and regular scrutiny will be necessary to keep the project on track against both plans and budgets. Mechanisms will be put in place to report any deviations from budgets and timescales.
- (18) It is technically feasible to establish links to some County Council services to deal with common enquiries like highways and feed relevant information to the County Council. This would assist residents who may not necessarily appreciate the demarcation of service provision between the two bodies. However, should

such enquiries require staff intervention, it is assumed that this would be a call on District Council resources, and this would require further consideration.

- (19) The Digital Strategy has a lot of interdependencies, some of which are identified at the start of the strategy. The Digital Team will work closely with Customer Services to ensure that any activities are fully understood, appropriately built and delivered in a sustainable way. Engagement with members and the Council’s senior leadership team will also be frequent, to ensure support and buy-in for the strategy delivery and long term effectiveness.