

Title: Progress Update – Merger of ICT Systems
Lead Officer: Head of ICT
Portfolio Holder: Councillor Hales
Wards of the District directly affected: All Indirectly

Summary

It was requested at the previous meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee that a report would be brought forward to update on progress towards the merging of ICT systems and data, including plans if the authorisation for full political merger is denied, to enable effective Scrutiny of the proposals.

Recommendation(s)

- (1) That the contents of the report are noted and any comments arising are fed back to the Head of ICT.
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1 Background/Information

1.1 This report outlines the work that has already been undertaken and the plans that are in place for the merger of key ICT systems. These activities are in support of Warwick and Stratford District Council's merging services to create a single, statutory South Warwickshire Council by 1st April, 2024.

1.2 Progress to date

1.2.1 Whilst authorisation for a formal merger is still under consideration, some progress has already been made to make the sharing of ICT services easier with our existing systems. These include:

- *Consolidation of Email Accounts*

Staff who are shared between Stratford and Warwick District Council's now only have one email account. Whilst both an independent Stratford and Warwick district address is presented to the outside world, all messages are routed to a single address in the background. This significantly reduces the email management burden on shared staff and reduces the overall licensing costs incurred by the Council.

- *Shared Calendars*

Staff across both organisations can now automatically share calendars, showing either free/busy or more detailed information of their choice. The sharing of calendars significantly improves how efficiently joint meetings can be organised and allows staff in teams with shared managers to access their service leads more easily.

The principles put in place to share calendars between Warwick and Stratford District Council's could easily be applied to other public sector organisations in the future.

- *Shared Teams Environments*

Services within both authorities can now request that shared Microsoft Teams environments are created, facilitating greater collaboration and closer working.

The shared access goes beyond simple meetings and can also be used to share chat environments, supports the co-authoring of documents and the sharing of files.

- *Migration of both Council's to Office 365*

Both Council's have now completed their initiatives to migrate all users to Office 365 for core services such as email, One Drive (for storage) and Teams.

- *Remote Access to Applications*

Facilities have been put in place to allow shared staff members remote access to applications that are native to one organisation. Previously this could only be accommodated by providing the officer with a separate device. Instead, a remote connection to a virtual PC from the officer's native laptop now allows them to securely access services that are only available on their joint organisations network.

- *Joint Solution Procurement Methodology Agreed*

The Joint Management Team recently approved a joint process for the design, evaluation, prioritisation and procurement of new ICT solutions. The introduction of new solutions will be co-ordinated by ICT in conjunction with service areas in a collaborative fashion and all services must now fully consult ICT before introducing new technology solutions.

- *Parallel ICT Audits*

It was agreed by each Council's respective audit teams that this years (and future) ICT audit programmes will be carried out in parallel, with both organisations being subject to the same auditing activities. This year, two thirds of planned audits will be common across both Councils.

- *Joint Staff Portal*

A central hub that is accessible to staff from both councils has been created and is currently being used to support collaboration and the dissemination of information relating to the merger process.

- *Common Desktop Solutions*

Both Councils have rolled out desktop hardware solutions that are identical across their buildings and have utilised Dell laptops for their deployments to staff. Each desk in both Council's offices has a common combination of two 24" screens, a USB-C docking station, keyboard and a mouse. Physical phones have been removed and each staff member has been provided with a headset for telephony usage.

Whilst the software configurations of laptops are currently bespoke to each authority, staff can work from either Council's site interchangeably, in the same way as they may work from any other agile location.

- *Common Hybrid Working facilities*

Both Councils are currently equipping their meeting rooms to facilitate hybrid working. Whilst the long-term future of both Council's offices may

be in question, the solutions introduced may ultimately be re-located to a new site, and standard equipment has been used at both locations.

The solution being introduced should be simple for staff and visitors to use, presenting only two commonly recognised cables (USB-A and HDMI) for people to connect. Once plugged in, dedicated cameras and microphones will support clear conversations with remote participants, who will be displayed on a screen appropriately sized for the room.

1.3 Our applications

- 1.3.1 Both Warwick and Stratford District Council operate a significant number of legacy line-of-business applications. Some of these applications despite their age remain supported by the supplier and widely used within the local government space, but this does not mean they will be fit for use within the South Warwickshire Council of the future or adequately provide for services now.
- 1.3.2 The merger process will require the consolidation of major business applications and this will not be completed by 2024. The scope of work involved with merging applications is simply too big to fit within a two year window without massive and unrealistic investment in staff resources and external support. As such, ICT will work with the programme management team to identify the areas that require prioritisation, according to the service order within the merger, the priority areas of the Council, statutory requirements and service area satisfaction.
- 1.3.3 Table one identifies the major line of business applications in use by services at both Councils. As can be seen, all services except Revenues and Benefits have different platforms in use, but even where commonality does exist, there are significant differences in how the systems are operated, which will still require reconciliation.

Service Area	Warwick DC	Stratford DC
Revenues and Benefits	Civica	Civica
Housing Services	MIS Active H	Uniform / Arbitras (partnership)
Planning and Building Control	Idox Accolade	Idox Uniform
Customer Services	Cisco Telephony No CRM	Mitel Telephony In-House CRM
Regulatory Services	Civica APP / Arcus	Idox Uniform
Legal Services	NA	Iken
Democratic Services	CMIS	Modern Gov
Elections	Express	Express
Finance	Tech One FMS	Civica Financials
GIS	GGP	ESRI
Website	Jadu CMS	In-house CMS

Document Management	Multiple application specific vendors	Multiple application specific vendors
Payments	Capita / Allpay	Capita / Allpay
BACS DD	Bottom Line e-Pay	Pay Gate
LLPG	Idox Accolade	Idox Uniform
Asset Management	Active H	Idox
Licensing	APP	Uniform
Payroll and HR	iTrent	iTrent / Tempus
Carparks	Chipside	Chipside
Document Capture	Adhoc	Kofax
<i>Table 1 - Major Line of Business Applications in use at both Councils.</i>		

- 1.3.4 It is important to note that the merger of line of business applications will be an extremely complex undertaking. It will take a lot of time and will incur significant financial costs which may not have been fully described in the February outline business case. At this stage, it would be impossible to put an accurate figure on the costs of merging business applications as there are factors involved in deciding a future direction that simply cannot be addressed. As such, each merger will be considered on a case-by-case basis which fully explores the financial implications.

1.4 **Our Core ICT Infrastructure**

- 1.4.1 Core ICT services are provided at both Councils by ICT and whilst currently independent, are broadly based on the same technology and systems. For example, both Council's core server estate uses the Microsoft Windows operating system, anti-virus solutions are common and the use of Office 365 as a productivity tool is already established. However, the commonality of some components does not significantly reduce the magnitude of the task faced by ICT as outlined below:

- **Telephony**

Both Councils currently use different telephony solutions. Stratford utilise the Mitel platform for their contact centre operations and Microsoft Teams for their general office telephony. At Warwick District Council, Cisco telephony is used throughout.

Telephony will be one of the first services brought together, with key provisions required to support the launch of the joint waste service in August 2022. In a wider context, a common telephony platform will be essential to providing joint customer service operations and is seen as a priority component for merger.

- **Server Estate**

Both Council's operate a significant on-premise server estate that in both instances, will require replacement within the next two years. This issue is complicated further as both Council's utilise different server virtualisation technologies, which will require reconciliation before any merged data centre operations begin.

It is expected that a significant number of the Council's current systems, if not directly replaced, will be migrated to cloud hosted solutions as part of their natural upgrade process. This however will not be the case for all solutions and ICT will investigate the future requirements for on-premises server hardware as part of its migration plans.

- Desktop Estate

Both Councils completed a refresh of their desktop estate during 2020-2021. As such, it is anticipated that the hardware purchased as part of this refresh will continue to be serviceable for at least the next five years.

There are presently several differences in how desktop services are provided between the Councils, such as deployment methods, VPN usage, two factor authentication systems and software versions. These will be reconciled as part of the merger process to establish a common desktop standard used across both organisations.

- Network Estate

Both Councils currently operate independent networks which utilise different physical hardware and, are supported by different suppliers for wide area network and internet access services.

As part of the merger process and in consideration of plans to move to a new shared headquarters, ICT will design a new network infrastructure and supporting hardware for the South Warwickshire authority. We will also consider the structure of our wide area network and internet services to remove any single points of failure, in support of the significantly enhanced agile working provisions both authorities now have. Improved security will also be a significant consideration in the new solution design, as a number of technologies and techniques now exist that were not possible when our current networks were designed.

- 1.4.2 The ICT team is currently working on a 12-month programme to bring as many core services together as possible. Work is currently underway to secure a common domain name, which will then be used to facilitate the creation of a new joint environment, whilst not affecting existing critical services. The production of a common environment will have financial implications and as with application consolidations, these will be brought forward on a case-by-case basis.

2 Alternative Options

2.1 Prepare for Shared Services

- 2.1.1 ICT is currently considering its solutions from the perspective of a joint South Warwickshire authority being created. However, many of the same activities would still need to be undertaken even if a proposal simply to share services was taken forward instead.
- 2.1.2 The solutions being designed will be flexible enough to maintain the sovereignty of each organisation should a full merger not be undertaken. A shared email system for example will still be capable of presenting independent email addresses for both Stratford and Warwick District Council's without any significant impact on how information is shared.
- 2.1.3 As a potential consequence of opting for shared services only, some applications for a limited number of services may have to remain as separate

systems. Most modern applications can accommodate multiple tenancies, but this is not a default position for all suppliers. Sharing services may also lead to more complex licensing arrangements as it will not be possible for one Council to simply use the software of the other without a contractual agreement.

- 2.1.4 Preparing for shared services is not necessarily an alternative option, but simply a choice that can be made in the future and is presented here to highlight that ICT can support either model of operation in the future.

2.2 **Remain Independent**

- 2.2.1 This option is essentially “do nothing” where both ICT services would continue to manage their own independent applications and core services.

- 2.2.2 As this report shows when discussing progress to date, this method of working can be done, but its benefits and advantages are very limited. At present, we have taken this method as far as it can go and whilst it is acceptable on a limited basis, it does not scale up to an authority wide solution. It also does nothing to support any of the strategic benefits identified as part of the merged authority business case.

- 2.2.3 This is not considered as a viable alternative option.

3 **Consultation and Member’s comments**

- 3.1 The purpose of this report is to enable Members to make comments.

4 **Implications of the proposal**

4.1 **Legal/Human Rights Implications**

- 4.1.1 This report does not have any specific legal or human rights implications, but the subject matter of the report will have, in time. These will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

4.2 **Financial**

- 4.2.1 This report does not have any financial implications, but the subject matter of the report will have. These will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

4.3 **Council Plan**

- 4.3.1 The Council’s Fit for the Future Strategy is designed to deliver the vision for the district of making it a Great Place to Live, Work and Visit. Whilst this report has no direct impact on the Fit for the Future outcomes, the subject matter of the report will. The potential, high level impacts are outlined in table two.

People	Services	Money
External		
No direct impact on intended outcomes.	The improvement of services through the Digital programme will contribute towards the Council becoming net	No direct impact on intended outcomes.

	carbon zero.	
Internal		
<p>Digital Programme will improve the digital capabilities of staff, Councillors and Senior Leadership.</p> <p>Merger programme will result in the harmonisation of processes and technology, improving the tools available to staff to carry out their responsibilities.</p> <p>ICT's work programme will require full engagement with staff in service areas to support and empower them through the transformation of ICT provisions.</p>	<p>The Digital Programme champions putting the customer at the centre of all future service design activities from both a technology and process perspective.</p> <p>The transformation programme will require a comprehensive review of our internal processes to optimise these for digital delivery.</p> <p>Every aspect of ICT's involvement in the merger process will increase the digital provision of services.</p>	<p>The Digital Programme will seek to optimise the Council's use of both its technology and information assets.</p> <p>The optimisation of licensing and consolidation of line of business applications will support the Council's efforts to manage costs and seek best value for money.</p>
<i>Table 2 – High level anticipated impacts on the Council plan.</i>		

4.4 **Environmental/Climate Change Implications**

- 4.4.1 This report does not have any environmental or climate change implications, but the subject matter of the report will. These will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

4.5 **Analysis of the effects on Equality**

- 4.5.1 This report does not have any equality implications, but the subject matter of the report will. These will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

4.6 **Data Protection**

- 4.6.1 This report does not have any data protection implications, but the subject matter of the report will. These will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

4.7 **Health and Wellbeing**

- 4.7.1 This report does not have any health and wellbeing implications, but the subject matter of the report will. These will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

5 **Risk Assessment**

- 5.1 This report does not have any specific risk implications, but the subject matter of the report does. As such, the most significant risks identified to date are summarised below:

5.2 Failure to adequately cost software mergers

This risk describes the likelihood that the financial implications of fully merging software applications are not understood by the authority and as such, insufficient resources are put in place to deal with this.			
As Is		With Recommendations	
Likelihood – High	Impact – High	Likelihood	Impact
The strategic business case did not identify or fully explore the costs of merging ICT applications.	Applications may not be successfully merged, resulting in duplicated costs and additional support burdens.	Low	Low
Control Recommendations	Considering each merged system on a case by case basis, following the recently agreed ICT Solutions Procurement method, will allow the authorities to fully understand the costs and benefits of merging an application. In most instances, re-procurement of solutions would eventually be required anyway, to remain compliant with procurement regulations.		

5.3 Failure to adequately resource the merger process

This risk describes the likelihood that the merger process will not be fully resourced from an ICT perspective, with deficiencies in areas such as project management, business analysis and technical expertise.			
As Is		With Recommendations	
Likelihood – High	Impact – High	Likelihood	Impact
The strategic business case did not identify or fully explore how ICT related projects would be resourced.	Failure to resource projects effectively may result in prolonged implementation times, sub-standard implementations or significant service failures.	Medium	Medium
Control Recommendations	The workplan of ICT will be made visible to the Transformation Working Group and Joint Management teams. The prioritisation of workload will contribute to ensuring that ICT does not become overloaded with projects whilst still attempting to “keep the lights on” and conduct day to day operations. The introduction of appropriate project management resource will also help to ensure ICT’s projects remain effective, on track and deliverable.		

6 Conclusion/Reasons for the Recommendation

- 6.1 This report sets out current position on the work being undertaken to provide a shared ICT service in conjunction with Stratford District Council.

7 Background Papers

- 7.1 [Merger Business Case](#)
- 7.2 Procurement Harmonisation and Project Support (JMT Report)

Report Information Sheet

Please complete and submit to Democratic Services with draft report

Committee/Date	2 nd November 2021	
Title of report	Progress Update – Merger of ICT Systems	
Consultations undertaken		
Consultee *required	Date	Details of consultation /comments received
Ward Member(s)		
Portfolio Holder WDC & SDC *	25.10.21	Cllr. Hales
Financial Services *	25.10.21	Mike Snow
Legal Services *	25.10.21	Phil Grafton
Other Services		
Chief Executive(s)	25.10.21	Chris Elliott
Head of Service(s)	25.10.21	David Platts
Section 151 Officer	25.10.21	Mike Snow
Monitoring Officer	25.10.21	Phil Grafton
CMT (WDC)	25.10.21	Chris Elliott, Andy Jones, Dave Barber, Tony Perks
Leadership Co-ordination Group (WDC)		
Other organisations		
Final decision by this Committee or rec to another Ctte/Council?		Recommendation to Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Contrary to Policy/Budget framework		No
Does this report contain exempt info/Confidential? If so, which paragraph(s)?		No
Does this report relate to a key decision (referred to in the Cabinet Forward Plan)?		No
Accessibility Checked?		No issues