

## Advance questions and answers on reports on the O&S agenda 5 July 2022

### 5. Work Programme Update – Digital Strategy

Questions asked by Councillors Syson and Richard Dickson (Liberal Democrat Group) with [answers supplied by David Elkington – Head of ICT](#)

1. On 1 June, Housing Minister Rt Hon Christopher Pincher MP announced a £1.1m fund to test the use of digital tools and data standards across 10 local areas which included WDC and Stratford. Cllr Cooke commented: “The Planning White Paper published last year highlights Government’s desire for Local Plans to be fully digitised, more visual, web-based, and based on the latest digital technology. It also indicates that this should improve public engagement in the Plan making process. I am therefore delighted that the two South Warwickshire Councils are amongst a select few authorities to have been chosen to test the use of digital tools, thus leading the way in this area.”

How does this fit in with the new digital strategy?

Response:

The allocation of funding to Warwick and Stratford-on-Avon District Council’s will indeed be used to assist in the digitalisation of the local plan.

The intended outcome of the pathfinder programme is to translate Local Plans into online, digital resources which can be interrogated from a map interactively rather than a traditional flat document. The pathfinder identifies a number of local plan standards to be used, which should ultimately improve accessibility and the integration of the plan with other services.

At SDC and WDC, the funding is being used to cover the costs of a support officer who will assist with data capture and the digitisation of the local plan itself. This has a tremendous number of benefits, particularly within planning. If for example, the local plan layer were added to our development control system, it would be possible to autonomously search for local plan policies and their associated text every time a planning application is captured. These could then be included in reports and decision notices automatically. The data could also then be presented in other systems, on the Council’s website and intranet.

The pathfinder activities are not directly under the control of ICT (i.e. part of a specific digital agenda item), but they are within the spirit of the previously agreed Digital Strategy. The activities will open up our data for re-use, make better use of spatial information and can contribute to the automation of services.

2. It's proposed (paragraph 1.2.7) that plans for a new CRM system will be brought forward for consideration in Q3 2022 for rollout in Q1 2023. Is there any indication of the possible costs of introducing such a system (even just ballpark figures) and from where this would be funded?

Also, how confident are you that if a decision is made in Q3, that the first services could be rolled out in Q1 next year? Does this really allow enough time for UAT?

One of the lessons of our community engagement during the recent COVID pandemic has been that there are still many people in our District who do not have access to any form of digital technology. What reassurances can you provide that WDC's digitalisation strategy does not leave these residents feeling disenfranchised?

Response:

In response to this question, I would like to ask that Members consider the cost of implementing a CRM system can vary significantly depending on the desired functionality, software provider and other fluid factors such as the number of users. Any proposals formally submitted in the future will have a properly costed business case which fully identifies and accounts for everything the Council would need to spend.

As a "ballpark" figure, assuming that we would like a full service CRM that integrates completed with e-forms and key back-office systems, includes workflow, implementation support, etc., I'd expect year one costs of around £130,000 - £150,000. Then depending on the number of users the system hosts and the levels of integration we decide are required, probably around £40,000 each year afterwards in maintenance.

However, as said, this could vary significantly and the figures above assume a completely new system (which would replace some platforms that we already have). If we alternatively opted to add functionality to an existing system the costs may be significantly less.

Funding will have to be confirmed but would likely be taken from the ICT Service System Alignment Reserve. Again, please be assured that any future business case would have to be approved by our finance team, with funding identified across its lifecycle. We would not sign the Council up for anything we cannot afford or would create unjustifiable financial pressures.

In terms of timing – we will keep this continually under review as a difficulty or hold up at any stage could delay things. However, it would be important that we start to use any system we procure relatively quickly. Getting high-quality, positive outcomes at the start of what will be a long term project is absolutely essential. Most CRM providers now are hosted so our technical requirements may be limited and in advance of this we could already be working with service areas to identify and build processes. All of this will help us to move forward quickly whilst maintaining service quality.

Regarding the delivery of services for non-digital residents, we will absolutely not leave any resident behind.

Our Digital Strategy and its delivery will remain true to the Council's values of being Community Focused, with Fairness and Equality. The benefits of redesigning services for digital will flow across other service channels. For example, if we were to

implement a CRM, the same e-forms would be used to complete a transaction on the website as would be used internally for staff face to face or over the telephony. Any assisted transaction would then benefit from the transparency and efficiency of the digital process, but would remain accessible via the customers chosen channel. People could also swap channels and in all instances, the information will be consistent and open.