

Agenda Item No 7
 Overview and Scrutiny Committee
 19 April 2023

Title: Work Programme Update – Digital Strategy
 Lead Officer: Head of Customer and Digital Services
 (david.elkington@warwickdc.gov.uk)
 Portfolio Holder: Councillor Tracey
 Wards of the District directly affected: None

Approvals required	Date	Name
Portfolio Holder	11/04/23	Cllr. J. Tracey
Finance	11/04/23	Andrew Rollins
Legal Services		
Chief Executive	11/04/23	Chris Elliott
Head of Service(s)		
Section 151 Officer	11/04/23	Andrew Rollins
Monitoring Officer	11/04/23	Graham Leach
Leadership Co-ordination Group		
Final decision by this Committee or rec to another Cttee / Council?	No	
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?	Yes	

Summary

This report provides an update on the Council's progress towards its Digital Strategy ambitions.

Recommendation(s)

- (1) That members note and review the progress made to date.
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1 Background Information

- 1.1 In December 2021, the Cabinets of both Stratford-upon-Avon and Warwick District Council's considered and approved the creation of a Joint Digital Strategy.
- 1.2 The intention of the strategy was to embed digitalisation as a component of service integration; ensuring that as services from the two Councils were brought together, digital was at the forefront of the revised delivery methods.
- 1.3 The strategy focused the Council's activities on customer centric digital outcomes, through investment in service design, training, infrastructure, effective operational technology and several key digitalisation initiatives.
- 1.4 When the merger process was aborted in April 2022, the Joint Digital Strategy also ended. In August 2022, Overview and Scrutiny was provided with an update report, regarding progress towards some of the Digital Strategy outcomes and work toward a replacement.
- 1.5 This report provides a further update on the key workstreams which have continued to be undertaken at Warwick District Council and an overview of other works undertaken by the Customer and Digital Services (C&DS) team. Some of these were not accounted for during the previous update.

2 Progress to Date – Previous Initiatives

- 2.1 This section contains updates relating to initiatives previously included within the August 2022 update.

Key

- Significant progress made / ongoing project with a plan and resources.
- Some progress made / ongoing project requiring review.
- Limited progress made / project requires significant review.

- 2.2 *Hybrid Mail and eSignatures* ●

August 2022

Scrutiny was updated that the roll out of Hybrid Mail and eSignatures would commence in Q2 2022/23, anticipated for completion within 12 months.

- 2.2.1 This project continues to make significant progress and is now inclusive of all services.

- 2.2.2 When hybrid mail was first agreed for trial by the (then) Joint Management Team, the Council's Revenues and Benefits service was unfortunately excluded from the process. However, in the months following the Council's separation, the team became heavily involved in the trial and have subsequently worked through multiple complex challenges. This is a significant step forwards that would not have been possible without the sustained effort and determination of the associated teams.
- 2.2.3 C&DS are presently working with service areas across the Council and procurement colleagues to find a suitable hybrid mail provider. This is following the preparation of a detailed requirements specification that will ensure the Council finds a solution which meets our business needs and supports the goals of the original business case; to lower costs and improve service efficiency.
- 2.2.4 It is desired to have hybrid mail ready for use by the time the Council relocates from Riverside House. If this is not possible, every effort will be made to ensure the service is introduced fully by the end of Q2 2023/24.
- 2.2.5 The roll out of our eSignatures package also continues to progress, particularly within the housing service where it is being championed as an efficient and effective method of capturing tenant signatures.
- 2.2.6 Whilst originally procured as a joint WDC/SDC system, our eSignature environments have now been separated, allowing much more flexibility in how WDC uses the software. C&DS recently configured the use of Single-Sign-On, removing the need for separate credentials and work has also started on automation integration; using the eSignature software to autonomously generate documents and request signatures based on the outcome of processes within other systems.

2.3 *Combined Telephony*

August 2022
 Scrutiny was updated that ICT intended to recommence the review of our telephony in Q3, 2022/23 for anticipated completion within 12 months.

- 2.3.1 C&DS have continued to progress with this project behind the scenes and several milestones have been completed.
- 2.3.2 The Council's existing Cisco Telephony system was updated in June 2022, facilitating the continued use of our contact centre solution for up to 18 months. This was a critical update as the previous software version was dependent upon the legacy browser, Internet Explorer, which was no longer supported.
- 2.3.3 C&DS has engaged with its Microsoft reseller, Phoenix, regarding the introduction of telephony within Microsoft Teams and with its existing network support provider, ITGL, regarding our telephony platform. Within the coming weeks, C&DS will begin the first phase of our service engagement, to identify telephony requirements within individual teams.
- 2.3.4 Our current communications provider, Daisy Communications, is also being engaged to discuss the technical details of re-routing our existing telephony circuits into a Teams compatible platform.
- 2.3.5 It is still anticipated that this project will be completed within Q3 2023/24. C&DS will endeavour to avoid taking any of our existing "server room" telephony hardware to our new Saltisford base and will also be working to integrate any

“legacy” telephony solutions with the main corporate platform. None of the council’s existing desk phones are intended for migration to Saltisford.

2.3.6 Replacing our existing contact centre environment will be treated as a second phase activity, after the migration of our principal telephony to MS Teams. Our existing contact centre licensing includes an option to use Cisco Webex Contact Centre, which is also Teams compatible and could serve as a viable alternative to our existing system.

2.4 *Creation of a Digital Team*

August 2022

It was anticipated that a revised Digital Strategy proposal put to Cabinet would result in the creation of a dedicated Digital Team within three to six months.

2.4.1 Whilst the anticipated revised Digital Strategy was not produced within the original timescales, work towards the creation of a digital team did continue and the benefits of this are now becoming apparent to the service areas it works with.

2.4.2 Within C&DS, a small team of three are currently working with multiple service areas to support the development and delivery of several workstreams. The team is comprised of:

- Transformation Lead
- Project Manager
- Project Apprentice

2.4.3 The Project Manager post is new to the authority, having been recruited in January 2023. The Project Manager is currently working to support the telephony project, replacement of the Council’s Planning and Building Control system and the replacement of our Geographic Information System. The role was created, initially on a temporary basis (2 years), with the intention of supporting service areas through the introduction of new IT systems.

2.4.4 This is the first time C&DS has had a dedicated project manager available, which has already been beneficial to the Planning and Building Control teams. The ability to have a single point of contact, liaising between technical and business contacts and, overseeing all associated activities has helped significantly in the requirements gathering process.

2.4.5 The Transformation Lead has engaged with multiple service areas through the Hybrid Mail and e-Signatures project, building on existing work completed with the noise project to help revise customer delivery methods. The officer has also championed the Council signing up to the Digital Declaration and was instrumental in the establishment of a nationwide “Application Managers Network” - which was one of our digital commitments.

2.4.6 Locally, again, having a resource available to work with service areas, to look at their processes and ask “what if” questions has been invaluable. The Transformation Lead has championed the use of customer centred design and an excellent example of this was the noise project; not only was the service team engaged to help develop the proposition, but service users were also involved to directly influence the service outcomes. This is a model of development C&DS will look to take forward in the future.

2.4.7 Our Project Apprentice is also currently managing multiple projects whilst also completing a Project Management degree. Notably, the officer is working with services to deal with the forthcoming Public Switched Telephone Network (PSTN) switch off; which will see the national cessation of traditional voice telephony. Whilst most of the Council's services already use Voice over IP telephony, some critical services remain dependent on PSTN.

2.4.8 Proposals for the revised Digital Strategy will continue to include plans for an expanded Digital Transformation team, which is particularly important given the ambitions of the Council's Change Management Programme; project management will continue to be a bottleneck function as will capacity to design customer centric digital services. However, the future business case for developing the team will be much more evidence based, built on the achievements of the existing group.

2.5 *Risk Management* ●

August 2022

Scrutiny was updated that ICT had started to use a new online risk management system that may be suitable for wider corporate use.

A trial was anticipated for completion by March 2023.

2.5.1 C&DS continue to use the Grace Risk Management platform to effectively control and manage its corporate risks. In the past 12 months the flexible, cloud-based system has helped the targeting of resources within the service and has proven the comprehensive risk approach taken by the service to external assessors.

2.5.2 The system has also continued to develop with several improvements, including:

- Linking service risks as contributors to wider Significant Business Risks;
- Recording Actions including ownership, updates, and key dates;
- Recording Incidents including occurrences, near-misses, and external events;
- Improved reporting to approximate our corporate style and trend analysis over time; and
- Development of templated risk registers and reusable controls.

2.5.3 Whilst wider corporate adoption has not taken place to date, a trial is currently being prepared for the Neighbourhood and Assets team. It was recently agreed by the Council's Risk Management Group that before a wider roll out is taken forward, the usability of the system and its value within a team outside of C&DS should be fully tested.

2.6 *Introduction of a Customer Relationship Management System* ●

August 2022

Scrutiny were informed that a business case for a corporate CRM system would be produced in Q3, 2022/23 and if accepted, the first services would be rolled out in Q1 2023/24

2.6.1 This initiative is currently behind schedule.

- 2.6.2 In August 2022 it was discussed that a review of the Arcus platform (being introduced to Regulatory Services) was underway to consider the potential for its underlying Salesforce CRM to function as a corporate platform. This resulted in several encouraging conversations and the exploration of multiple use-cases, as the Salesforce CRM was found to be a very capable and expandable platform.
- 2.6.3 Unfortunately, the project faced other significant issues and development was ceased in November 2022.
- 2.6.4 Whilst the cessation was not connected to the Salesforce CRM platform, the licences for this were part of a larger package which the Council opted not to take forward. The cessation also led to the diversion of resources to support the Council's off-boarding process which involved the development of the Council's existing e-forms solution.
- 2.6.5 Introducing a corporate CRM system remains a cornerstone digital project and this will be picked up in Q2 of 2023/24. The introduction of a CRM would be critical if the Council desired to, for example, manage customer interactions for the Recycling and Waste service. A paper was also discussed by the Council's Senior Leadership Team in December 2022, which looked at the dynamics of a corporate CRM system and the implications this may have for service delivery.
- 2.6.6 A business case for a corporate CRM will be brought forward in Q2 2023/24 with the continued intention to launch services within three months of a successful procurement exercise.

3 Progress to Date – New Initiatives

- 3.1 This section contains details of new initiatives that were not previously included within the August 2022 update.
- 3.2 *Replacement of ICT Infrastructure*
 - 3.2.1 The intention to replace ICT network, storage and server infrastructure has been an ongoing proposition for the past two years. Much of the work was intentionally delayed in 2021 and early 2022 due to the merger, as the replacements were seen as an opportunity to harmonise the technology stack used between the two Council's. At the time, these were very different.
 - 3.2.2 With the merger's cessation and the forthcoming move to Saltisford, work on replacing ICT infrastructure commenced in earnest in September 2022. C&DS began discussions with its existing support suppliers to identify future designs for our server, storage and network systems, which will continue to have an on-premise presence for several years to come.
 - 3.2.3 The future ICT infrastructure design will utilise the latest technology to build on our existing virtualisation platform and successful hybrid-cloud applications. Far greater use of centralised management tools and automation will be a feature of the new hardware systems, which will also build on our resilience, particularly for our network which is currently dependent on limited bandwidth links.
 - 3.2.4 The revised design will also take account of our changed working patterns, providing performance and stability, for an organisation that is no longer confined to a 9 to 5 office environment. Our power consumption and cooling requirements have also been reduced, contributing towards reducing the Council's carbon footprint.

3.2.5 Orders for replacement storage, network and server infrastructure will be placed in April 2023 with delivery expected within three months. New hardware will be used to support the delivery of our Saltisford site, but where this is not possible (for example if a delay in shipping equipment is experienced), our existing equipment will be reused. Whilst this is not a long-term solution, our current kit is supported for at least a further 12 months which will be more than adequate to bridge any delays in replacement.

3.3 *Offboarding of Arcus*

3.3.1 In November 2022, Overview and Scrutiny received a report noting the termination of the Council's contract to replace its regulatory services software. As a consequence, C&DS in conjunction with the Council's Web and Regulatory Services teams successfully off-boarded all data from the Arcus platform and shifted online services to an alternative system.

3.3.2 Data from Arcus was exported and re-integrated with the Council's existing Civica APP platform, which remains in use by the service area. It is still intended that this system is replaced, however, resources to accommodate this are currently not available. Primarily this is because they're supporting the replacement of Accolade (for planning and building control).

3.3.3 The Council's existing Jadu eforms package was used to recreate the online forms previously hosted by Arcus, with some internal development work by C&DS to integrate these forms with back-office systems. Whilst our version of the Jadu platform does not have the same "my account" functionality of the system it replaced, the replacement forms provide a suitable interim solution.

3.3.4 Overall, offboarding from Arcus (from an C&DS standpoint) took three months to complete and required no additional support from the supplier. During this time, no disruption to customer facing services was experienced and all data was successfully migrated. The Council no longer has a presence within Arcus's systems and all our data has been fully deleted.

3.4 *Cyber Security Improvements*

3.4.1 Whilst cyber security has always been a priority for the Council, over the past six months, C&DS has undertaken several specific programmes to improve our cyber security posture.

3.4.2 Working with specialists from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, the Council was awarded a grant of £100,000. The money was intended to facilitate the development of some security processes and to ensure the swift upgrading of a small number of legacy applications, running on Windows Server 2012 R2 – which will be de-supported in October 2023. This work is on-track and all Server 2012R2 systems will be decommissioned before the October deadline.

3.4.3 C&DS also successfully completed the Council's PSN accreditation, which is required to access certain central government services, such as those provided by the Department for Work and Pensions. Failing to successfully re-certify our accreditation could have resulted in termination of access, which would have directly impacted on the public.

3.5 *Replacement Intranet*

- 3.5.1 C&DS in conjunction with the Council's web team and service areas has successfully replaced the Council's ageing intranet; moving from an on-premise, legacy Sharepoint site, to a fully functional Sharepoint Online system.
- 3.5.2 The new intranet platform, which launched on April 11th, 2023, fully integrates with the Council's Office 365 environment and includes elements of personalisation such as upcoming priority tasks and personal suggestions. The site can also be used as an extranet, accessible from outside of the Council's network, for users with the correct access credentials (such as Councillors).
- 3.5.3 The replacement of the intranet is a significant step forward that will allow the Council to make far greater use of other Microsoft technologies such as automation, reporting and eventually supportive artificial intelligence. The new site is also not dependent on customised templates, which became a significant stumbling block for the Council upgrading its previous intranet.
- 3.5.4 The upgrade project has been completed entirely in-house and has seen services from across the Council refresh and update their content. Whilst the replacement project itself has reached the end of its first phase, further work will now be undertaken to build on the content, improve the functions available to staff and ensure the intranet can function as a single source of information, for any Council function.

4 Revising the Digital Strategy

- 4.1 In August 2022, Scrutiny was informed that ICT intended to bring forward a revised Digital Strategy in Q3 2022/23. Unfortunately, due to other resourcing demands it was not possible to complete this work within the original timescales, but this has however afforded the Council several opportunities to enhance its response.
- 4.2 Since the previous update, ICT has merged with Customer Services to form a distinct Customer and Digital Services group. This arrangement of customer delivery capacity alongside the team primarily responsible for digitalisation initiatives will provide the Council with a unique opportunity to fundamentally address how customer service is delivered in the long term.
- 4.3 Our Customer Access strategy was last revised more than a decade ago and there have been significant organisational changes since that time. The original Digital Strategy proposed a three-pronged approach to digital transformation, revolving around customer access, ICT's technical delivery and the digitalisation of services. The three strategies to define how this will be done, will now all be co-ordinated by Customer and Digital Services.
- 4.4 In late 2022, Warwickshire County Council also launched its own Digital Strategy, complementing its 2020 Customer Access Strategy. Whilst not of direct consequence to Warwick District Council, the County's strategies should be considered as influential; some of the directives outlined within their proposals will influence our own.
- 4.5 The roll out of full fibre internet is a good example of this, as it is an important consideration for our own infrastructure development. The County Council have direct responsibility for this and supporting the work of commercial companies, but as a district, our businesses and residents will directly benefit. Within our own strategies and policies therefore, we need to take account of and accommodate their influence.

- 4.6 In February 2023, Warwick District Council also agreed to undertake a significant Change Management Programme, towards which digitalisation will be a significant contributor. The Change Management Programme proposals acknowledged the need to make the council financially stable, whilst also investing in new technology. The Digital Strategy and the associated delivery plan will help to drive this programme forward and realise some of the potential benefits.
- 4.7 Further contributing to the revised strategy, the Transformation PAB was previously asked to identify any priority areas they thought needed to be included in a future plan. Whilst several points were raised, the overriding concern was that we produced digitalised services that worked for our communities and could benefit everyone, regardless of their chosen method of interaction. This was always an intention of the Digital Strategy, but it is now clear that any future version will have to be very specific in how this will be achieved.
- 4.8 It is currently planned for a revised Digital Strategy and outline delivery plan to be delivered at July cabinet. A framework document is already in progress, which will be flexible enough to account for any changed priorities the Council may have, whilst maintaining critical initiatives that must be taken forward. This will link directly to the change management programme, capturing initiatives that will be most influential soonest and deliver the most value for our public.

5 Consultation

- 5.1 None.

6 Background Papers

- 6.1 WDC, 2021 - [Joint Digital Strategy](#)
- 6.2 Overview and Scrutiny, August 2022 - [Work Programme Update – Digital Strategy](#)
- 6.3 Overview and Scrutiny, November 2022 - [Regulatory Services Software Replacement Project - Review and Termination of Supplier Contract](#) (Requires Login)
- 6.4 Cabinet, February 2023 - [Change Management Programme](#)

7 References

- 7.1 WCC, 2022 - [Digital Strategy](#)
- 7.2 WCC, 2020 - [Customer Access Strategy](#)
- 7.3 WDC, 2011 - [Channel Strategy](#)