

BRECKLAND DISTRICT COUNCIL

Report of: Alison Webb, Executive Member for People and Information
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To: Cabinet – 16 October 2018
Council – 25 October 2018

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Subject: ICT and Digital Strategy 2019-22 and Digital Work Programme

Purpose: To implement a new strategy which aims to improve residents' experience of contacting Breckland Council while also increasing the efficiency of our overall operating arrangements

Cabinet to recommend to COUNCIL:

- 1) That the draft ICT and Digital Strategy be approved, and be implemented from April 2019 to align with the Council's new Corporate Plan.
- 2) That the Digital Work Programme associated with the strategy be approved, subject to Council approving the transfer of funding as detailed in the Pro forma B from Moving Forward (transformation) and Growth and Investment reserves.

1.0 BACKGROUND

The ICT and Digital Strategy (Appendix A) has been designed to support the wider aims of the Breckland Corporate Plan and its corporate priorities. In particular, it makes a key contribution towards helping the Council to 'provide the right services, at the right time and in the right way'.

- 1.1 It builds on the work already undertaken as part of the ICT Programme, launched in 2017 following a Council decision in 2016 to invest in:
- Creating a new ICT infrastructure to deliver improvements to its ICT services
 - Enhancing security and disaster recovery
 - Putting foundations in place for staff mobile working and improved information sharing

This also included investing in a new in-house ICT service (recruiting 7 FTEs) which was launched in 2017 having served noticed on the Council's previous arrangement with Norfolk County Council.

With most projects now complete, the ICT Programme has helped the Council build a secure and resilient foundation in preparation for the digital improvements it wants to make to not only the way customers access services but how those services are designed and provided – to be more responsive, efficient and cost-effective.

- 1.2 The Council recognises the potential of digital technology to transform the district and the lives of residents while generating long-term savings. However, to maximise the benefits that digital technology can bring, the Council wants to increase the scope and in some areas, the pace, of this work.

2 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY FEEDBACK

2.1 The draft ICT & Digital Strategy was presented at a meeting of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Commission on 17 August, where a number of comments and suggested changes were raised by Members.

2.2 Mobile/agile working

2.2.1 In particular, Members requested that greater emphasis be placed within the document for using technology to enable both staff and elected Members to work remotely from home, or from multiple locations – with the end outcome of saving travel and meeting time, as well as maximising the use of council office space.

2.2.2 Additional comments were added to page 11 of the strategy document to address Members' feedback in relation to this point.

2.3 Contact channel prioritisation

2.3.1 Members also fed back comments about the proposed prioritisation of the Council's online channels over other, more traditional methods of customer contact such as telephone and face-to-face, as part of a discussion relating to the draft Customer Access Strategy.

2.3.2 In response to this, further amends were made to the proposed digital principles which are featured in both the draft Customer Access Strategy and the ICT & Digital Strategy. So whilst giving prominence to digital channels – wherever possible and for those that can access services in this way – the Council will also ensure that those customers that can't – or choose not to – go online, still have a variety of ways to contact the Council.

2.3.3 The changes made to emphasise this point can be seen on pages 24-25 of the ICT Strategy and are aimed to provide greater reassurance – to Members and our customers – that all channels will continue to be offered to customers, in recognition of their different needs, digital skills and preferences.

2.4 Overview and Scrutiny – final feedback

2.4.1 These amendments were reviewed at a subsequent meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission on 27 September, where Members agreed, subject to the changes being made, to recommend to Cabinet that:

- 1) The draft ICT and Digital Strategy be approved, and be implemented from April 2019 to align with the Council's new Corporate Plan.
- 2) The Digital Work Programme associated with the strategy be approved, subject to Council approving the transfer of funding as detailed in the Pro forma B from Moving Forward (transformation) and Growth and Investment reserves.

3 STRATEGY

3.1 The strategy outlines the approach that the Council will take to develop and roll out digital technologies that support efficient and cost-effective service delivery, ensuring these solutions work for our customers.

3.2 Setting out the next steps to achieving the digital improvements as part of a three-year vision for the Council, the strategy works towards implementation of an integrated ICT

platform, allowing every service to access, process and analyse customer data from a single source – helping to drive service improvement and efficiency.

3.3 It focuses on technology as an ‘enabler’ for the strategic transformation of the Council’s core business processes, redesigning services and enabling access to them in the most cost-effective way, with the aim of giving customers choice and meeting their needs within the resources the Council has available.

3.4 The strategy will be underpinned by a Digital Work Programme (Appendix C) and an ICT Work Programme which will be brought forward as part of the Council’s Budget setting process for 2019/20.

3.5 Strategy vision

The strategy’s vision is to provide high quality, easy-to-use services that are designed with customers in mind, delivered efficiently with improved value for money.

By encouraging customers to self-serve, wherever possible and practical, the Council can focus its more intensive contact channels, like face-to-face, on those who need the most help and support to access services.

3.6 Strategy ambitions

Underpinning the strategy is a set of high level aims which will help shape the way we:

- Improve digital opportunities for customers to help them access a better experience of Council services, and beyond
- Give staff and elected Members the right digital tools and training to work ‘smarter’
- Minimise internal costs of services
- Generate revenue by:
 - Making it easier and more convenient to pay online
 - Using digital marketing to promote our traded services

3.7 Strategy themes

The ICT and Digital Strategy proposes to focus on – and group – future activity and projects around four key themes:

- Digital Foundation – Much of the ICT Programme work, so far
- Digital Customer – Where the Digital ‘team’ has been focusing its efforts, to date (Eg: website, online forms, book and pay, etc.)
- Digital Council – Giving staff and members the technology and tools they need to be effective/productive
- Digital Place (our wider district) – A longer-term ambition to digitise the district (Eg: better broadband, etc.)

4.0 STRATEGY PRINCIPLES

The strategy includes a number of key features, including:

4.1 Digital design principles

These align to government best practice standards and have been developed so that all council departments and their staff are signed up to working in a consistent way when reviewing or redesigning services.

4.2 As outlined in section 2.3 of this report, some suggested amendments have been made to these principles to provide greater reassurance to Members that all channels will continue to be offered to customers, in recognition of their different needs, digital skills and preferences.

4.3 **Architecture principles**

The approach the Council will take to the designing, sourcing and deploying of ICT and Digital systems will be defined by a number of key architectural principles, covering how the Council will:

- Use data to design better services
- Share learning and resources to reduce costs and speed implementation
- Use cloud hosting of services and data, where appropriate, rather than using physical servers
- Procure systems that 'talk to each other'
- Create a digitally capable workforce through training and development

Above these sits a single guiding principle, however, that the use of ICT and Digital by the Council must **add value to the customer**; whether that be a resident, elected Member, business, partner organisation or other service within the Council.

5.0 **TECHNICAL GOVERNANCE**

The successful delivery of this strategy will be dependent on people as much as it will technology, and ensuring that all services are working in line with the principles, as set out in points 3.1 and 3.2 of this report.

Reporting to the Council's ICT and Customer Board, a new ICT and Digital Steering Group will be set up to prioritise developments, based on customer demand and savings to the back office; and engage with services to provide or improve upon their online service 'offer'.

A crucial part of the group's role will also be to ensure that the relevant support services are involved in purchasing (Contracts Team) or developing (ICT and Web teams) new systems, processes (Corporate Improvement Team) or ways of working (Learning and Development Team).

The ICT and Customer Board will be accountable for the delivery of the Digital Work Programme, outlined in section 6 of this report, below.

6.0 **DIGITAL WORK PROGRAMME**

6.1 The delivery of this strategy and its associated Digital Work Programme (Appendix C) is closely linked to the Customer Access Strategy 2019-2022.

6.2 The Digital Work Programme underpins both strategies by identifying corporate priority projects for digital service transformation and improvement, including:

- **Customer Services:** enabling the re-engineering of all key service request processes, and the roll-out of self/assisted-service by replacing and improving our Customer Relationship Management system. This will encourage a higher take-up of online services while reducing officer processing time.

- **Economic Development:** creating an improved online business portal to improve support and advice to small and new businesses. This will help to promote the district as a place where businesses are encouraged and supported to locate and expand.
- **Strategic Assets:** creating an improved web portal for Breckland Council's commercial property to maximise rental opportunities and revenue.
- **Housing:** automating access to services and information and prioritising support requests to provide a more responsive service to customers, particularly those most in need.
- **Revenues and Benefits:** integrating systems to create a single customer sign-on, improving customer experience, encouraging take-up of digital services/online payments.
- **Planning/Environmental Services:** integrating a new GIS (Geographical Information Service) software into the Council's website and 'My Breckland'. This will enable customers to self-serve for relevant information quickly and easily, while reducing officer processing time (Eg: to enable customers to search for and view planning applications in their area, or report a fly-tip).

6.3 Resource requirements

- 6.3.1 The total cost to the Council of delivering the Digital Work Programme is estimated at £442k. This comprises additional staff resource, software, systems and development costs, which are set out in more detail below, but does not include the costs of the Public Protection system as this is subject to a separate report.

This report proposes the transfer of £317k of the Moving Forward (transformation) funds to pay for the programme's delivery along with £125k from the Growth & Investment reserve for the adoption of Goss to replace the Council's existing CRM (Customer Relationship Management) system which delivers an ongoing return.

6.3.2 Staff resource

To deliver the work programme an additional staffing resource of £189K is required, comprising:

- 1 FTE Programme Manager (18 month, fixed term)
- 1 Web designer (2 year, fixed term)
- 1 Web developer (2 year, fixed term)

This is expected to provide the necessary capacity to support delivery of the programme within the three-year ICT and Digital strategy timeframe.

6.3.3 Capital and revenue costs

In addition to staffing costs, programme costs of £253k have been identified, as detailed in the attached Appendix B.

7.0 OPTIONS

- 7.1 That the new ICT and Digital Strategy and Digital Work Programme be approved, subject to Council approving the related funding to pay for the programme's delivery, and be implemented from April 2019 to align with the Council's new Corporate Plan

7.2 Propose changes to the ICT and Digital Strategy.

7.3 Do nothing.

8.0 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION(S)

8.1 The strategy sets out a clear plan for making best use of Council resources to meet the needs of its customers – residents, businesses, staff and elected Members – while achieving value for money for the Council.

8.2 Not only does the strategy aim to improve services, it also anticipates a reduction in costs over the three-year period, through increased productivity, rationalisation and re-procurement of systems and software, automation of service processes, and as more customers seek to access Council services online.

9.0 EXPECTED BENEFITS

9.1 By implementing an integrated ICT platform, the Council will be able to access, process and analyse customer data from a single source – helping to drive service improvement and efficiency.

9.2 By transforming the Council's core systems and business processes, Council services and staff will be able to operate in a more efficient and cost-effective way.

9.3 As more customers choose – and expect – to transact with the Council via its website, the Council anticipates being able to make significant savings to its operating costs.

9.4 By giving staff and elected Members the right digital tools and training, they will be to work 'smarter' and more productively.

9.5 By making it easier and more convenient to pay online, and by using digital marketing to promote our traded services, the Council will be able to maintain or generate revenue.

10.0 IMPLICATIONS

In preparing this report, the report author has considered the likely implications of the decision - particularly in terms of Carbon Footprint / Environmental Issues; Constitutional & Legal; Contracts; Corporate Priorities; Crime & Disorder; Equality & Diversity/Human Rights; Financial; Health & Wellbeing; Reputation; Risk Management; Safeguarding; Staffing; Stakeholders/Consultation/Timescales; Transformation Programme; Other. Where the report author considers that there may be implications under one or more of these headings, these are identified below.

10.1 Corporate Priorities

The strategy supports the Council's Corporate Plan priority of 'providing the right service, in the right way at the right time' by providing easy access to information, advice and support through multiple access channels, and by ensuring our business processes are as efficient and cost-effective as possible.

10.2 Equality and Diversity / Human Rights

10.2.1 Residents, businesses and visitors will continue to be able to contact the Council by any of the following channels:

- Web
- Telephone
- Post or email
- Face-to-face
- Social media

And the Council will contact them by web chat, telephone, post, email and social media.

10.2.2 Web:

Breckland Council's website aims to conform to Level AA of the web content accessibility guidelines of the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) which particularly considers protected groups, including people with disabilities.

Breckland Council's website also features the option of a 'Recite Me' toolbar, which makes content more accessible with reading and translation support. Text can also be downloaded as an MP3 digital audio file.

Residents with hearing or visual impairments can view the website content in extra-large font/text to assist people with visual impairments, and sound/audio buttons are designed to benefit those with hearing impairments.

The carers (including family and friends) of older frail residents and of children and young people will benefit from transacting and finding out about services online. Many carers try to balance caring with work and careers and they will be able to access the Council 24:7.

10.2.3 Telephone:

While the strategy aims to encourage more residents to contact the Council online, it does not reduce or change residents' access to telephone contact channels to raise queries or access services. It aims to improve the current service by reducing customer demand for this channel, and therefore will be of benefit to all groups who continue use this as a way of contacting the Council.

10.2.4 Face-to-face:

Face-to-face services will be reconfigured to provide greater access to self-serve facilities and support to use these.

Face-to-face appointments will continue to be available for those who feel they need them (Eg: for more complex enquiries and more vulnerable customers) at Dereham and Thetford five days a week. And at Attleborough, Watton and Swaffham libraries, face-to-face support is currently offered two half-days a week at each location.

10.3 Financial

The strategy also takes account of the increasing financial pressures faced by local Government and the need for all councils – including Breckland Council – to ensure they are delivering services as cost-effectively as possible.

The delivery of this strategy and its associated Digital Work Programme (Appendix C) is closely linked to the Customer Access Strategy 2019-2022. Initial high-level workings indicate that a saving of up to £70,000 by the end of year 3 could be achieved if the Council meets its target of 50% of customers contacting them via digital means. This will be reviewed at the end of year 2.

See attached Pro forma B (Appendix B) for further information.

10.4 Staffing

Please see section 5.3.2

10.5 Constitution/Legal

The ICT and Digital Strategy does not form part of the Council's policy framework, and is consistent with the Council's Corporate Plan.

However, the Digital Work Programme contains both direct financial and staffing implications. As such, this element is a non-executive decision which falls to the Council to determine.

10.6 WARDS/COMMUNITIES AFFECTED

All wards are affected by the strategy.

11.0 ACRONYMS

11.1 ICT – Information Communication Technology

11.2 GIS – Geographic Information System

11.3 CRM – Customer Relationship Management

11.4 W3C – World Wide Web Consortium

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Key Decision: No

Exempt Decision: No

This report refers to a Discretionary Service

Appendices attached to this report:

Appendix A Digital and ICT Strategy 2019-2022

Appendix B Pro forma B

Appendix C Digital Work Programme