

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT

TITLE OF INFORMATION NOTE: DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION PROGRAMME UPDATE

INFORMATION NOTE OF THE CUSTOMER & DIGITAL SERVICES MANAGER

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: COUNCILLOR IAN ALBERT

PRIORITY: ACCESSIBLE SERVICES

1. SUMMARY

1.1 This information note is to provide an update on the Council's digital transformation programme.

2. STEPS TO DATE

2.1 The Council, like many others, has been faced with a number of challenges which along with changes in customer expectations and demand means that we must embrace the opportunities that digital transformation can create to enhance service delivery and make the best use of our valuable resources and our people. Greater adoption and evolution of council wide digital services is no longer an optional aspiration, it is essential for us to create much needed capacity within the Council whilst enhancing the service offerings to our customers.

Some of the specific challenges include:

- On-going public sector recruitment and retention challenges in several key areas, including IT
- Multiple business applications in use across the Council, all with different contract end dates
- No integration between applications meaning silo data sets, inconsistent customer experience and inefficient processes
- Many applications developed in house that need to be replaced but without capacity to do so quickly enough

2.2 To help address these issues, in 2023, the Council embarked on a new chapter of its digital transformation ambitions. With our Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system contract ending in March 2024, we were provided a timely opportunity to explore various digital platforms that were capable of not only replacing the CRM but supporting the wider digital ambitions. Through extensive market research and testing, we explored several new platforms to better understand their capabilities and how they align with our longer-term organisational goals.

2.3 An increasing number of Councils across the country are utilising these digital platforms to achieve their goals, whilst supporting each other through a tightknit community. Ultimately, we selected a low-code solution from Netcall, which offered the flexibility and efficiency we needed, allowing us to begin significantly accelerating the Council's digital transformation.

- 2.4 In parallel with these efforts, we developed a comprehensive digital strategy which was approved by Cabinet in January 2024. This strategy is not just about integrating new technologies; it's about transforming our operations to better meet the needs of those we serve. It's a commitment to continuous improvement and innovation in our service delivery.
- 2.5 To date, the programme has delivered on several goals outlined within the digital strategy, including:
- Investing in a low code digital platform and started to build a suite of new digital services, including a replacement CRM system
 - Implemented live chat and an intelligent chatbot service
 - Moved our intranet to SharePoint, making this the heart of internal information and services
 - Signed up to the Digital Declaration
 - IT replaced the helpdesk solution to create a modern support function and a better self-service experience for staff
- 2.6 There are also several goals that we have started and are on-going pieces of work, including:
- Continuing to make services digital by default, without compromising other channels for those who need them
 - Conducting a customer centric review and re-design of end-to-end processes
 - Developing and implementing a programme of application development and rationalisation of legacy systems
 - Ensuring all appropriate customer contact is routed via our Customer Service Centre channels
 - Working and collaborating with and learning from others, i.e. other Councils, Local Digital.
 - Maximising our investment in Microsoft, and other tools available
 - Experimenting with new technologies where appropriate, such as machine learning, Generative AI (e.g. ChatGPT) and voice activated services
 - Continuing to robustly maintain the security of the Councils network and data

3. INFORMATION TO NOTE

- 3.1 The Council has always pursued digital innovation, but with limited resources, our journey has been one of progressive evolution. The onset of the Covid-19 pandemic brought significant changes in work practices and customer interactions, accelerating our digital transformation efforts.
- 3.2 The Council faced many challenges, including being unable to implement solutions in a timely manner, public sector recruitment and retention issues, multiple business applications with different contract end dates, lack of integration between applications, and the need to replace in-house developed applications.
- 3.3 With our CRM contract ending in 2024, we explored various digital platforms to replace the system. After extensive market research and testing, we procured a low-code solution in Netcall, which offers flexibility and efficiency. This solution has allowed us to not only replace the CRM but also to accelerate the Council's digital transformation. Alongside this, we developed a comprehensive digital strategy focused on continuous improvement and innovation in service delivery. It's important to note the purchase of the

digital platform and the Digital Services team has been created using existing budget and resources.

3.4 Netcall's low-code platform enables us to build new applications and streamline workflows with limited resources. The platform we have internally named 'Connect' allows rapid design, creation, and deployment of applications that automate tasks, improve experiences, and optimise business operations. Over 100 other councils are using Netcall's platform, facilitating collaboration and knowledge sharing.

3.5 Our strategy aims to establish a robust digital infrastructure that supports efficient service delivery and enables swift responses to residents' evolving needs. Our objectives are:

Efficient Working: Remove manual and duplicate processes to enhance employee experience

Customer Insight: Gain customer insights to provide consistent and enhanced service in line with the previous "People First" aim, which will also provide better data

Cost Reduction: Reduce current and future costs by decommissioning several legacy applications, and replacing them with solutions built within the low-code platform, thereby releasing cashable and non-cashable savings over the longer term

Faster Development and Innovation: Accelerate innovation with an iterative approach

Agility and Responsiveness: Increase agility and faster response to feedback and changes

Collaboration: Collaborate with other councils to achieve end-to-end service design for common customer touchpoints

3.6 The leadership team has a clear vision for digital transformation and regularly communicates it across the Council. We aim to provide training and upskilling opportunities to all staff to keep up with the pace of change. Collaboration and communication are fostered by encouraging cross-functional teams and facilitating knowledge sharing.

3.7 The success of our on-going digital transformation programme depends on active participation from all stakeholders. We involve employees to ensure our digital initiatives reflect the diverse needs and expectations of our staff and the community. The IT Manager is the technical lead for the digital programme which ensures projects are a collaborative effort across the Council, and ensures all projects are aligned with IT's technology roadmap and future plans.

3.8 To ensure appropriate governance is in place, an oversight group was established consisting of the Managing Director, 3 Service Directors, and the Executive Member for IT & Digital. The group are appraised of progress, advise on any critical decisions that need to be taken to enable further progress and provide recommendations / guidance for future work streams. The group have overall oversight of the delivery of the programme against the detailed project plans.

3.9 We are committed to continuous improvement by regularly monitoring and evaluating our digital initiatives. This helps measure impact, identify areas for enhancement, and ensure value delivery to residents and staff. Our digital transformation journey aims to create a future-proof local authority that is responsive, agile, and resident-centric.

- 3.10 The strategy addresses challenges and changes in customer expectations and demand, emphasising the need for digital transformation to enhance service delivery and remove inefficiencies. It focuses on making technology work better for staff, simplifying processes, and being data-led in decision-making. The strategy also highlights the importance of creating value, making a positive impact on climate commitment, and adopting an agile and iterative approach.
- 3.11 As part of our commitment to professional development, we have partnered with Multiverse, a renowned (OFSTED Excellent) training provider to upskill staff across the Council. 19 staff members from across the organisation were part of phase 1, joining several different apprenticeship opportunities, including an advanced data fellowship, AI for business value and data and insights. More opportunities to join a future phase will be offered in the coming year.
- 3.12 The items chosen for the programme of works are based upon the following:
- Contract end date (cost saving)
 - Cost avoidance
 - Process improvement
 - Application rationalisation
 - End of life

The programme of works is constantly reevaluated to ensure the planned works are in the best interest of the Council.

4. NEXT STEPS

- 4.1 Each project delivered will have a case study written to capture any benefits realised and lessons learned, this also enables us to share our work on the programme across the Council, ensuring all staff members and our customers are kept informed and included on the continuation of our transformation journey.
- 4.2 Digital Transformation is included in the Council Plan as a corporate project and progress will continue to be monitored and reported in the same way as the Council's other corporate projects.
- 4.4 In November 2024, the Corporate Peer Review was held. The feedback received about our digital transformation programme was wholly positive, but there are a number of items we need to work on in the coming years, including:
- Focus on digital inclusion
 - Continued engagement with staff
 - Golden thread throughout the Council plan, priorities and service plans
 - Capitalising on digitalisation skills across the organisation

5. APPENDICES

- 5.1 Appendix A – Digital Strategy 2024 - 2027

6. CONTACT OFFICERS

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7. **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

None.