

Digital Strategy for Cambridgeshire County Council

To: Strategy & Resources Committee
Meeting Date: 11 July 2023
From: Executive Director of Finance and Resources

Electoral division(s): All

Key decision: Yes

Forward Plan ref: 2023/008

Outcome: The committee is being asked to approve the Digital Strategy for the Council and the related Data, Technology and Cyber Strategies and supporting action plan.

Recommendation: The Strategy and Resources Committee is asked to agree:

- a) the approval of the Digital Strategy for the Council and the related Data, Technology and Cyber Strategies for Cambridgeshire County Council; and
- b) the funding of the strategy through the business planning process.

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1. Background

- 1.1 The current strategy for Cambridgeshire County Council was agreed in 2019 and was a shared strategy with Peterborough City Council. The vision of that strategy was to ‘Simplify, Standardise and Share’ with key workstreams around shared IT infrastructure delivered by a single provider, convergence of key business systems and a shared web and digital platform.
- 1.2 In 2019, no one could have predicted the events that were to follow in early 2020. Although the response to Covid presented huge technical, behavioural, and time-critical challenges, it also provided opportunities to do and think about things differently.
- 1.3 Post pandemic and in the context of national, regional, and local changes and challenges the Council requires a fresh Digital Strategy which is summarised in section 2 with additional information in sections 3, 4 and 5.
- 1.4 The cost implications of the Digital Strategy will be fully worked through as part of the business planning process as the work needs to sit within the affordability of the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS).

2. Summary of the Digital Strategy

- 2.1 The Digital strategy sits within the wider Strategic Framework of the Council and is one of the key cross-cutting strategies included in the framework.



2.2 The ITDS (Information Technology & Digital Service) strategic vision is for Digital Services that are Secure, accessible, modern, and customer-focused to help create a sustainable 21st century council.

ITDS will act as an enabler for individual services within the Council, supporting them in achieving their own aims and requirements while prioritising the customer journey. This customer focused strategy ensures that digital solutions align with the needs and preferences of the people that use Council services. We will not mandate a specific approach but will maximise the opportunities of digital solutions, suggesting and informing the adoption of technologies that enhance the customer experience.

By being proactive in engaging with the business we will encourage a modern thought process regarding IT and Digital provision, emphasising the importance of customer satisfaction and engagement. This approach will help departments see the longer-term implications ultimately leading to better outcomes for customers.

The legacy approach of 'This is how we've always done it' will be replaced by a more dynamic methodology that places the customer at the centre. There should be a move from manual operations using paper and post to 'digital by default' for all interactions with service users, partners, and community organisations. This will improve efficiency, effectiveness, timeliness of contact but also allow Council services to use the customers preferred methods of communication, enhancing the overall customer experience.

We will exploit our position of being a trusted advisor to promote these changes; we have the skills, experience, and capability to provide a highly effective service.

ITDS will operate in an ethical manner promoting the use of digital technology and services for the benefit of all. We will be fair, transparent, and environmentally conscious.

The Digital strategy is made up of five themes –

- Community
- Partners
- Inclusion
- Sustainability
- Workforce

Running through each of these themes are four 'golden threads'

- Customer Journey
- Digital Skills
- Artificial intelligence
- Data

2.3 As well as the Cambridgeshire County Council Strategic Framework which articulates the vision and ambitions of the Council, the Digital Strategy is informed by and related to other strategies, intelligence, guidance, and initiatives. Some of these are national, for instance the 12 digitisation outcomes published by the Local Government Association (LGA). Others are more specific to our area, for example the Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Digital

Connectivity Strategy and the Digital Strategy of the Integrated Care System. Links to all related information are included in the appendix of the Digital Strategy.

- 2.4 In addition to these areas the digital strategy has been informed by engagement with and feedback from Members and service areas across the Council and it is also underpinned by discrete but complementary Data, Cyber & Technology Strategies. These are summarised briefly in section 4 along with links to the full strategies.
- 2.5 The strategy adheres to guiding principles which support best practice, value for money, inclusivity, agility, Cloud first and ease of use. These principles are supported by the [Technology code of practice](#) published by central government.
- 2.6 The actions to support delivery of the vision are captured in a separate document – ‘Digital Strategy Action Plan. These actions may be delivered solely by the IT & Digital Service, jointly with partners or, in some cases, solely by partner organisations.

3. Digital Strategy Themes & Golden’ Threads

- 3.1 Within the **Communities** theme, the vision focusses on supporting digital engagement with service users, how this follows through to service delivery teams and the digital infrastructure required to effect positive outcomes for the community.
- 3.2 The vision for **Inclusion** is that no one should encounter any barriers to using our digital services. Inclusivity should be built into our systems to ensure that everyone can benefit from them, regardless of ability or disability. It looks ahead to proactively embrace further opportunities to be more inclusive.
- 3.3 The next vision, on the theme of **Partners**, looks at how we will engage and collaborate with partners and external organisations. It covers how we will work to common standards and ensure that data is shared safely, securely, and appropriately to enable us all to fulfil our responsibilities, solve problems and deliver services effectively and equitably.
- 3.4 The **Sustainability** vision is for a service which uses digital technology to not only make the local economy work for the people of Cambridgeshire, but which does this in an environmentally and economically sustainable way. In enhancing Cambridgeshire’s digital landscape, we will enable more people to benefit from services without having to travel, reducing inequality, and promoting fairer access. The vision also proposes greater financial and environmental sustainability of IT delivery through, for example, the way we manage licencing and the reduced carbon footprint of storing data in the Cloud.
- 3.5 In the final theme we acknowledge the role that our **Workforce** has in the success or failure of our IT systems. We want all employees to have the right equipment and systems to do their jobs and have the confidence and skills to use them. This is essential if we are to reap the full benefits of our IT investment and if we want our organisation to achieve its efficiency savings and reduction in travel. As a provider of services, we value our ITDS staff and we are ensuring that we develop existing talent to its full potential, and future-proof the skill sets we have within the service, so that we have the right IT expertise at the right time.

3.6 'Golden' Threads – Customer Journey, Digital Skills, Artificial Intelligence & Data

- 3.6.1 Positive customer experiences and positive outcomes encourage people to use our services. We need to provide customers with a comprehensive and consistent experience, irrespective of channel or status (staff, resident, visitor, or partner). Having digitally engaged communities promotes, trust, inclusion and builds strong and invested societies. Opening more channels of engagement encourages underrepresented groups to participate.
- 3.6.2 Where the customer journey cannot be optimised using internal resources, partnership working is critical. We will support partners to fully utilise digital and technology options and shape and guide the standards/specifications used to provide services.
- 3.6.3 Customer experience should be so intuitive and accessible that they encounter no barriers to accessing digital services and skills.
- 3.6.4 For communities to take advantage of our digital offerings and experience a good customer journey, they need the necessary digital skills. Those who lack digital skills have fewer options available to them when using public services or our internal services to staff. Without the confidence and ability to get online, they will become more isolated and less engaged. It is vital that they are provided with the skills to allow them to take full advantage of all the services and information available to them.
- 3.6.5 That our workforce should be skilled and confident in the use of technology hardly needs stating, but if we want employees to help improve the customer experience, we also need them to be 'digitally aware'. The customer journey may involve multiple internal teams and so we need our employees to have a broad understanding of how the 'whole' fits together and where their service slots into it.
- 3.6.6 Over the last decade, significant advancements in Artificial Intelligence have been witnessed, particularly in the field of Machine Learning. In 2023, there has been a notable evolution in the form of Large Language Models. These systems are designed to understand and generate human-like text. They are trained on vast amounts of diverse data, allowing them to learn the complexities of language, grammar, context, and even generate creative and coherent responses. Moreover, these models have further progressed to generate images, video, and voice.
- 3.6.7 These advancements have brought about the democratisation and increased accessibility of AI (Artificial Intelligence), thereby reducing barriers, and making solutions more viable to support our work processes.
- 3.6.8 The possibility and opportunity of AI weaves through every aspect of themes within this strategy. By leveraging such technologies, it will be possible to generate unparalleled insights, enhance operational efficiency, and delivery of personalised experiences.

Data is a core asset and threads through all the themes of the Digital strategy. Understanding, improving, and harnessing data effectively into insight and intelligence supports performance management and efficiencies in operational processes, informs better and more robust decision making and empowers our residents and staff across all

aspects of council service design and delivery. A data centric culture will flourish across the organisation enhancing personalisation, prevention, automation, and innovation in service delivery while being mindful of information governance, ethics, and cyber security.

4. Supporting strategies (Data, Technology & Cyber Security)

4.1 Data Strategy

Our Data Strategy focusses on the value of data as a core asset. It emphasises the importance of data maintenance, quality and best practice whilst also promoting data availability and accessibility to those who need it. It advocates the requirement for services to know their data and how it should be processed so that they can take advantage of speedier business solutions. It states that the cross-organisational nature of our data is aided and facilitated by shared technology and goes on to highlight the need for interoperability of datasets, facilitated by common standards, to support automation and consistency.

4.2 Technology Strategy

The Technology Roadmap uses the themes outlined in the main Digital Strategy and details the proposed technologies that will be delivered to help achieve each theme's vision. Following advice from Strategy and Resources Committee in 2022 this has been externally validated and should also be read in conjunction with the Digital Strategy Action Plan.

4.3 Cyber Strategy

The aim of the Cyber Strategy is to protect the Council and for it to have cyber resilience at its core. This means having a holistic approach to cybersecurity that includes preparedness, response, and recovery, and focuses on ensuring that the council can withstand and recover quickly from any cyber security incidents. The strategy adopts national, government and industry standards and has five cyber objectives: managing risk, protecting against attack, detecting events, minimising impact, and developing the skills, knowledge, and culture necessary to mitigate the threat. To support these objectives, the strategy includes a comprehensive set of outcomes. Which not only cover technical themes, but also address the human element, governance, and management of our cyber intelligence.

5. Alignment with ambitions

5.1 Net zero carbon emissions for Cambridgeshire by 2045, and our communities and natural environment are supported to adapt and thrive as the climate changes

Addressing the sustainability of IT & Digital services is critical to achieving our Net Zero Carbon goal. ITDS will contribute by reducing the quantity of resources our IT provision consumes by moving to energy efficient cloud hosted infrastructure. In addition, we will use solutions to create more environmentally friendly alternatives for how we live and work such as deploying systems that can be accessed via any internet connected device, removing the need for staff and citizens to travel to specific locations to work or access services.

Ensuring that procurement of IT equipment is carried out with carbon emissions (to manufacture as well as run), recyclability and recycled content as part of the criteria.

Having a plan for extending the usable life of IT equipment and disposing of it in the most environmentally friendly manner.

5.2 Travel across the county is safer and more environmentally sustainable.

By making best use of technology, we can make travelling throughout the county faster, easier, and less environmentally impactful.

- **Public Transport** - Real time passenger transport information can be used to inform passengers regarding public transport routes and waiting times.
- **Air Quality** - Live assessment of air quality can enable dynamic management of traffic flow, including public transport.

The Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA) also have a comprehensive transport plan for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough which can be viewed [here](#) digital solutions and the data we can supply will support the CPCA in delivering this strategy.

5.3 Health inequalities are reduced

- Improving Digital Inclusion will support people to get online and use digital health resources. This can reduce health inequalities through:
 - Improving physical and mental wellbeing
 - Increased prevention
 - Improved self care
 - shared care and shared decision making
 - long term condition management
 - appropriate use of urgent and emergency care
- Utilising funding that has recently been provided by NHS England to help QC registered care providers, both domestic and residential to go digital. The ambition of that work is to start digitally connecting care providers to Social Care and medical records.
- Improve the availability, performance, and reliability of the IT tools available to our Business and Public Health Intelligence teams. By providing teams with virtual devices to analyse data and produce reports we can dynamically assign extra resources as and when they are needed.
- Increase digital self-service and interact with citizens on their terms via digital channels.

5.4 People enjoy healthy, safe, and independent lives through timely support that is most suited to their needs

We will ensure the relevant departments and partners have the support they need regarding digital to ensure the success of this partnership-based work. For example: - 'Virtual wards' where people can be discharged from hospitals and monitored remotely through technology and virtual stats is an upcoming initiative.

We will focus on the development of digital platforms to improve the process of gathering customer feedback and analyse what services have the most demand. That initiative will

lead to service improvements that are based on customer feedback and an increased uptake of those improved digital services.

We will continue to support Libraries in offering a wide range of services to communities and have them play a significant role in providing a point of contact for digital services, such as training, providing information, access to electronic devices and the means of safely connecting to the internet. Combined with public access Wi-Fi available across an increasing number of community locations to support safe and community-based access to digital services.

5.5 Helping people out of poverty and income inequality

We will develop our relationships with the following partners to support the delivery of digital skills in Cambridgeshire through advocacy both within our organisation and external partners.

- Cambridgeshire Digital Partnership
- Good Things Foundation
- Basecamp online community
- CCC (Cambridgeshire County Council) colleagues
- Cambridgeshire Skills

Libraries have launched a borrowable tech pilot with targeted promotion at digitally excluded groups. They are also starting coding activities in-person and online, including participation options for digitally excluded young people. The 'Digital Buddies' offer of 1:1 support in all Hub Libraries will be redeveloped with the potential to stretch outcomes to all libraries.

Connecting Cambridgeshire have initiated a 3-year programme to look at digital inclusion, assess the current situation and implement a plan for improvement.

5.6 Places and communities prosper because they have a resilient and inclusive economy, access to good quality public services and social justice is prioritised.

Working with Connecting Cambridgeshire and other partners we will continue in the provision of fast and reliable internet connectivity across the County and in making public access Wi-Fi available across an increasing number of community locations.

Working with internal departments and external partners we will help citizens and smaller businesses who do not have the skills and knowledge to fully exploit the above infrastructure.

We will support the CPCA in delivering their [Local Transport and Connectivity plan](#).

5.7 Children and young people have opportunities to thrive

The Digital Skills golden thread of the strategy is key to this as it is utterly fundamental to delivery of this ambition.

We will develop relationships with a variety of partners to support the delivery of digital skills in Cambridgeshire through advocacy both within our organisation and with external partners.

We will support services and partners in enabling all our citizens and service users to increase their digital skill level in line with the National standards for essential digital skills (publishing.service.gov.uk).

Support Libraries in all of the wide range of their initiatives in this area for example, in providing a common room for creative digital activities such as code clubs, arts, and STEM activities, open to all ages.

6. Significant Implications

6.1 Resource Implications

The following bullet points set out details of significant implications identified by officers:

- IT underpins almost all the services that the council provides to the people of Cambridgeshire and the IT Strategy is fundamental to the transformation of those services.
- The strategic approach outlined in IT and Digital Strategy cannot be delivered without a significant programme of structured work. The Digital Strategy programme of work is set out in the annual Projects and Programmes schedule. Each project which is identified as part of the annual plan goes through the six gateway approval stages as set out in the Project Management system for the Council. This starts with the scope of the project being outlined and presented to the relevant Financial Board (Capital or Revenue) to allocate budget for the project and reports on delivery against outcomes and benefits as defined in the Project Document.

6.2 Procurement/Contractual/Council Contract Procedure Rules Implications

- There are no significant implications within this category.

6.3 Statutory, Legal and Risk Implications

- There are no significant implications within this category.

6.4 Equality and Diversity Implications

The following bullet points set out details of significant implications identified by officers:

- Services will be designed with the needs of the user first & foremost
- We will fully leverage all accessibility options that are now available in the technology solutions utilised by the council
- We will facilitate greater understanding of accessibility options by encouraging staff to take up the free Microsoft Training on accessibility including the available tools in

Windows. Support staff to learn themselves and assist others who may need help with accessibility

6.5 Engagement and Communications Implications

The following bullet points set out details of significant implications identified by officers:

- The strategy has been reviewed by directorates and services across the Council, especially those that have the most direct and extensive contact with our customers and partners. The overall themes that have been developed for the strategy and the specific actions that are contained in the action plan represent the output of this engagement thus far. As with any strategy this is a snapshot in time and will need to be updated to ensure it contains the results of co-production, community, and partner engagement.
- The strategy has been available for review by all elected Members and a briefing was held for all Members on 12 June 2023.

6.6 Localism and Local Member Involvement

The following bullet point set out details of significant implications identified by officers:

- The strategy supports the ability of the Council to bring services and decision making closer to people and therefore the council's decentralisation/localism agenda.

6.7 Public Health Implications

- Improving Digital Inclusion will support people to get online and use digital health resources. This can reduce health inequalities through:
 - Improving physical and mental wellbeing
 - Increased prevention
 - Improved self care
 - shared care and shared decision making
 - long term condition management
 - appropriate use of urgent and emergency care

6.8 Climate Change and Environment Implications on Priority Areas:

6.8.1 Implication 1: Energy efficient, low carbon buildings.

Positive Status:

Explanation: The strategy will decrease the energy use for the council and/or communities through the move to cloud services.

6.8.2 Implication 2: Low carbon transport.

Positive Status:

Explanation: The strategy will decrease use/reliance on the private car as there will be less need to travel to access IT & Digital Services by staff or the members of the public.

6.8.3 Implication 3: Green spaces, peatland, afforestation, habitats, and land management.

Neutral Status:

Explanation: There are no direct implications for this priority area

6.8.4 Implication 4: Waste Management and Tackling Plastic Pollution.

Positive Status:

Explanation: The strategy will reduce waste generated by the council as devices for staff will be rationalised and reduced. Cloud services inherently produce less waste and can be scaled down as well as up to ensure the Council only consumes what is absolutely necessary.

6.8.5 Implication 5: Water use, availability, and management:

Neutral Status:

Explanation: There are no direct implications for this priority area but digital solutions such as AI can be utilised to provide data for modelling the current situation and proposed options as well as enabling more innovative ways of monitoring flood levels. This is already being explored by the GCP (Greater Cambridge Partnership) and this strategy will support that.

6.8.6 Implication 6: Air Pollution.

Positive Status:

Explanation: The Digital Strategy supports a reduction in travel for staff, residents, and visitors to the County through more inclusive and accessible digital services. There are no other direct implications for this priority area but digital solutions such as AI can be utilised to provide data for modelling the current situation and proposed options as well as enabling more innovative ways of monitoring air quality. This is already being explored by the GCP and this strategy will support that.

6.8.7 Implication 7: Resilience of our services and infrastructure and supporting vulnerable people to cope with climate change.

Positive Status:

Explanation: Acting positively to increase digital inclusion within the community will mean that all people (especially those that are vulnerable) have access to information about how to cope with climate change effectively.

Have the resource implications been cleared by Finance? Yes

Name of Financial Officer: Stephen Howarth

Have the procurement/contractual/ Council Contract Procedure Rules implications been cleared by the Head of Procurement and Commercial? Yes

Name of Officer: Clare Ellis

Has the impact on statutory, legal and risk implications been cleared by the Council's Monitoring Officer or Pathfinder Legal? Yes

Name of Legal Officer: Emma Duncan

Have the equality and diversity implications been cleared by your EqIA (Equality Impact Assessments) Super User? Not applicable

Have any engagement and communication implications been cleared by Communications? Yes

Name of Officer: Christine Birchall

Have any localism and Local Member involvement issues been cleared by your Service Contact? Not applicable

Have any Public Health implications been cleared by Public Health?

Yes

Name of Officer: Jyoti Atri

If a Key decision, have any Climate Change and Environment implications been cleared by the Climate Change Officer?

Yes

Name of Officer: Emily Bolton

7. Source documents

7.1 Source documents, including web links

The Digital strategy is informed by and related to various external sources such as:

- [Local Government Association - 12 Digitisation outcomes](#)
- Cyber security strategy - [NCSC guidance](#)
- Digital Skills Foundation - [https://www.digitalskillsfoundation.org/Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Digital Connectivity Strategy](https://www.digitalskillsfoundation.org/Cambridgeshire-and-Peterborough-Digital-Connectivity-Strategy)