



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

21 MARCH 2022

DIGITAL STRATEGY 2022-2026

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF FINANCE & DIGITAL SERVICES IN DISCUSSIONS WITH THE CABINET MEMBER FOR CORPORATE & DIGITAL SERVICES (CLLR MARK NORRIS)

Author(s): Tim Jones Service Director, ICT & Digital
Gareth Pearce, Head of Technology
James Vale, Head of Digital Transformation

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to set out the Council's updated Digital Strategy for the period 2022 to 2026.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Cabinet:

- 2.1 Consider and, if appropriate approve the Council's updated Digital Strategy (set out at Appendix A).

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 To ensure the Council continues to fully exploit the opportunities provided by 'digital' to meet the changing needs of customers and communities and support the on-going delivery of efficient and effective services.

4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1 To ensure the Council is well placed to take maximum advantage of a continually expanding digital world, Cabinet agreed the Council's first Digital Strategy at its meeting on 22nd June 2017 [Report Link](#) and on the 21st June 2018 agreed a Digital Work Programme to support on-going delivery of the Strategy [Report Link](#).

4.2 Since this time, regular updates have been reported to Cabinet and Scrutiny Committees to enable elected Members to review and challenge progress against the Digital Strategy:

- Overview & Scrutiny at its meeting on 5th February 2019 received and considered a report on the Digital Work Programme and acknowledged the adequacy of progress against the programme actions, alongside the governance arrangements that were in place [Report Link](#).
- Cabinet at its meeting on 17th October 2019 received and considered a report on progress against the work programme and agreed the requirement to bring forward a new Digital Strategy [Report Link](#).
- The Finance & Performance Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 16th December 2019 considered a report and presentation on the Council's Digital Strategy 2017-20, its work programme progress and provided observations and comments to inform the development of a new Digital Strategy [Report Link](#). In early 2020 our services and communities faced unprecedented challenges with the impact of Storm Dennis and the arrival of the Covid-19 pandemic, and whilst the intention was to develop a new strategy for 2020-2024, our focus was diverted to the immediate and critical priorities which were presented.
- The Finance & Performance Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 15th March 2021 received a presentation on the crucial role digitalisation played in supporting service transformation during Storm Dennis and the pandemic and agreed that a new proposed Digital Strategy be brought forward to a future Committee for consideration [Report Link](#).

4.3 It is considered that the work undertaken since the inception of the first Digital Strategy in June 2017 has made a positive difference to the delivery of Council services, this position being consistent with feedback from Cabinet and Scrutiny Committees. Progress includes:

- Increasing self-service and online transactions via the Council's website, examples being putting Covid-19 related business grant applications online, streamlining customer and back-office processes, enabling quicker decisions and speedy payments to RCT businesses during the pandemic.
- Enabling agile & flexible working to allow staff to effectively work from home and within the Community – minimising the impact on service delivery during the pandemic.

- Implemented free WiFi to over 90 Community & Council office buildings and key Town Centres to make it easier for people to get online.
- Delivered the 'Hwb' digital transformation programme to all schools providing new improved infrastructure and WiFi, ensuring schools are well placed to deliver upon the new curriculum for Wales.
- Provided over 5,500 laptops, tablets and WiFi access to School learners to support the digitally excluded.
- Enabled greater community access to political process and decision making through e-democracy.
- Supported digital inclusion and improvement of skills within the community via continued work with partners to support delivery of Digital Fridays and a device loaning scheme.

4.4 The Finance & Performance Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 30th November 2021, pre-scrutinised the draft Digital Strategy 2022-2026. Members discussed the strategy and comments were received in respect of fibre broadband and broadband “not spots,” Schools HWB Digital transformation, Community WiFi and Cyber Security.

4.5 Members agreed that the proposed Digital Strategy effectively set out the vision and the objectives to maximise the opportunities of 'digital' for our communities, our customers and for the Council [Minutes Link](#).

5. THE COUNCIL'S PROPOSED DIGITAL STRATEGY 2022-2026

5.1 The proposed Digital Strategy 2022-2026 seeks to build upon the progress made since 2017 and sets out our vision of being a truly “Digitally Driven Council,” that provides excellent services, which are efficient, effective and designed with the person and modern customer expectations at their heart and delivered by a digitally empowered workforce.

5.2 The Strategy reflects the ever-increasing role and reliance on digital in people’s everyday lives and seeks to harness the transformative impact it has. It also recognises that whilst demand continues to rise for online services, there are some who will continue to need our help to access digital services and those who need to be supported through more traditional channels.

5.3 Our strategy will be delivered through four thematic workstream areas:

- Digital Solutions and Service Design
- Data Insight and Intelligence
- Digital Infrastructure
- Digital Skills, Learning & Inclusion

5.4 The workstreams are underpinned by a set of overarching and guiding digital principles that will be applied to our approach as set out below:

- Proactively seek to prioritise the digital improvements that deliver the most impact and benefit.
- Create an organisational culture allowing digital to thrive and encourage active challenge of the status quo.
- Undertake a “Council First” approach to digital delivery and services, further enable cross-service thinking and ensure we avoid duplication to maximise our digital outcomes.
- Develop creative digital solutions for business problems that meet clearly defined requirements and targeted measurable outcomes using appropriate project delivery frameworks and partners when required.
- Embrace digital technology and practices seeking to maximise potential as part of our organisational planning and trigger business process change.
- Seek to leverage our data insights and data intelligence to inform efficient decision making.
- Maximise our return on investment, using where possible our existing digital applications and utilising in-house digital skills.
- Support access to intuitive digital services, that are easy to use and leave no-one behind.
- Openly share knowledge, good practice, collaborate and the sharing of solutions wherever possible.
- Reduce our carbon footprint through the implementation of digital solutions, supporting our ambition to be carbon neutral by 2030.
- Deliver solutions optimised for accessibility, the Welsh language and to meet Welsh public sector design standards.
- Deliver compliant solutions in line with legislation, such as Local Government Elections Act and GDPR.
- Deploy and maintain scalable, robust, secure and cyber resilient high performing platforms.

5.5 To deliver our ambitions, we will also need to ensure close alignment between our digital, workforce, asset management and medium term financial plan, alongside continuing to harness the positive cultural change seen during the pandemic to quickly adopt and embrace digital opportunities.

6. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS / SOCIO-ECONOMIC DUTY

- 6.1 To ensure that we meet the requirements of equality, diversity and the socio-economic duty, we have undertaken an Impact Assessment (Appendix B) to assess the effects of the Digital Strategy on these areas.
- 6.2 The Digital Strategy will support protected groups who choose to access digital services and allow people to participate fully as digital citizens / staff and members. The Digital Work Programme deliverables will be built on user-centred design principles and where possible developed to be bilingual and fully accessible, which will support equality and accessibility.
- 6.3 The Council's corporate website provides a high-level of accessibility rating and its supporting tools ensure strong levels of accessibility. Work will continue to improve our accessibility ratings. We will take further steps to mitigate negative impacts by ensuring initiatives (for example free public access PCs, devices loaning, connectivity and confidence/skills support) form part of the Digital Work Programme to reduce barriers.

7. WELSH LANGUAGE IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 To ensure that we meet the requirements of the Measure, we have undertaken a Welsh Language Impact Assessment (Appendix C) to assess the effects of the Digital Strategy on the Welsh language.
- 7.2 The Digital Strategy will support people who choose to access digital services through the medium of Welsh and allow people to participate fully as digital citizens / staff and members. The Digital Work Programme deliverables will be built on user-centred design principles and where possible developed to be bilingual and fully accessible, which will support the use of the Welsh language.
- 7.3 It should be noted that the digital marketplace does not always allow for the procurement of fully compliant bilingual solutions, however this will always be stated as a requirement and should we need to procure a solution that is not fully compliant, we will work with vendors to improve, lobby for change and consider alternative options e.g. software that replaces text in real-time.

8. CONSULTATION / INVOLVEMENT

- 8.1 To inform the development of the strategy, a number of engagement activities were carried out, including Officer and Member consultation

alongside community research and engagement with wider key organisations such as Digital Communities Wales.

- 8.2 The proposed Digital Strategy at Appendix A has been pre-scrutinised by the Finance & Performance Scrutiny Committee.

9. FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)

- 9.1 There are no financial implications aligned directly to this report. Digitisation is a key contributor to the delivery of the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan.

10. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED

- 10.1 There are no legal implications as a result of the recommendations set out in this report.

11. LINKS TO CORPORATE AND NATIONAL PRIORITIES AND THE WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS ACT

- 11.1 The proposed Digital Strategy 2022-2026 impacts on the community and all Council services and in doing so contributes to the delivery of the Council's Corporate Plan. The proposed Strategy also ensures the Council complies with its legal duty under the Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015.

- 11.2 Our strategy reflects the ever-increasing role and reliance on digital in people's everyday lives and harnesses the transformative impact it has. It recognises that whilst demand continues to rise for online services, there are some who will continue to need our help to access digital services supported through areas such as skills, devices or better connectivity. By providing this support we can open-up a new world of opportunities aligned to our Corporate Plan 2020-24 – 'Making a Difference' that sets out our priorities that will help us to achieve our Council's vision. ***"To be the best place in Wales to live, work and play, where people and businesses are independent, healthy, and prosperous."***

- 11.3 This proposed Strategy embraces the direction set by the Well-being of Future Generations Act that sets out Wales' ambition for a prosperous, resilient, sustainable, healthier, more equal Wales, with cohesive communities, a vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language. These seven goals alongside applying the five sustainable development principles of long term, preventative, involvement, integration and collaboration provides the strategic direction for the development of digitally enabled services. Appendix I of the proposed Digital Strategy

provides examples of how we will contribute to the seven well-being goals.

- 11.4 This proposed Strategy aligns to the national vision for adopting a digital approach across Wales. The Welsh Government's Digital Strategy for Wales and the Welsh Local Government Digital Strategy and Delivery Plan were published in 2021.

12. CONCLUSION

- 12.1 The Council's new Digital Strategy 2022-2026 articulates our medium-term vision, setting a clear direction of travel and framework within which our digital ambitions can be taken forward over the next four years.

Other Information:-

Finance & Performance Scrutiny Committee

Contact Officer – Tim Jones – Service Director for ICT & Digital

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

AS AMENDED BY

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

21 MARCH 2022

**REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF FINANCE & DIGITAL SERVICES IN
DISCUSSIONS WITH THE CABINET MEMBER FOR CORPORATE &
DIGITAL SERVICES (CLLR MARK NORRIS)**

**Item:
Background Papers**

Contact Officer – Tim Jones – Service Director for ICT & Digital