Nottinghamshire County Council

**REPORT OF HEAD OF TECHNOLOGY & DIGITAL, CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S DEPARTMENT**

**DIGITAL STRATEGY**

**Purpose of the Report**

1)   To seek approval of the Digital Strategy

**Information and Advice**

2)   The term Digital tends to be associated with technology however, it is much broader than that, and in this strategy, it is referring to the principles by which systems and products are developed within the council for use by its users, both internally and externally.

3)   This Digital Strategy has been drawn up to agree a set of principles by which, the Authority will develop new services and associated systems by taking the users' needs as the driver for how systems and services are developed within the Authority and its partners. This will enable services to be developed and enhanced in a manner that facilitates joined up working and supports the digital declaration that the Authority has committed to. These principles will also apply to services where there are significant changes to be undertaken.

4)   Historically services are developed in a client commissioner manner; this results in a specification being produced and agreed, issued to the supplier (internal or external), and a product being developed. The point at which the product is seen can be months after the specification is signed off. The delivered product does not always match the expectation because the consequence of certain decisions was not clear at the point at which they were made in the development of the specification. This can result in a sub-optimal delivery and significant re-work to get the product to function in a manner that was envisaged. This is also because expectations shift over time, and the agreed deliverables may no longer meet the expectations because they themselves have shifted.

5)   The consequence from the above can result in great frustration and massive effort in trying to retro fit remediation into systems that have already been deployed. Rework does follow which creates a massive amount of effort and uncertainty while trying to establish why the situation arose, meanwhile service users must deal with the consequences of sub-optimal systems and services.

6) Digital ways of working look to resolve this issue and change the way services and systems are developed and governed.

7) The first principle is that systems are based around user needs. This activity requires User Researchers and is very similar to co-development that the Authority currently undertakes. While it seems obvious, a lot of systems and services are developed making assumptions on how people will use systems, this principle seeks to avoid that and develop services in a way that makes them easy to use and obvious to the end user.

8) Building on the first principle Digital systems and the associated service development requires combined teams of people from the business areas and the supplier (internal or external), who work together and have the authority to make real time decisions on the development of the product or service. This allows clarification to happen all through the project and enables input from the user community to ensure any changes or, nuances that have not been picked up in the original scope, are resolved. All with timely user input throughout the development of the product or, service. It also deals with changes that occur during the development of the product or, service.

9) It should be noted that this does not make delivery easier, rather it forces some difficult decisions to be addressed earlier in a project lifecycle so increasing the likelihood of success. As such it is more about de-risking the final deliverable and getting a better usable product or, service. It also drives transparency because of the visibility of the deliverables and any issues enables timely decisions about how address them.

10) In this approach the governance is also altered from an oversight model to, a model that has oversight responsibilities but also accountability for facilitating the removal of blockers to progress. This changes the dynamic of the relationship between the Senior Responsible Office and Board members from one of mainly oversight and direction to being active participants engaging in the process of developing the product or, service. This means becoming active participants in the development of the service and/or product.

11) The Authority has signed the Digital Declaration, and this effectively commits the Authority to this way of working and the strategy sets out those principles.

12) There are also several business capabilities and ways of working that will need to be adopted to support designing services in a Digital manner and these are also set out in the strategy.


**The Key Themes & Business Drivers**

13) The Key Themes & Business Drivers relate to developing systems and services in a way that enables our citizens and staff to have services that work in a way that supports them in their daily life, rather than people having to understand and accommodate the idiosyncrasies of how services and systems are organised.

14) The Authority has also signed the Digital Declaration which commits the Authority to developing its services in this way. This allows the Authority to secure some resources from the DLUHC to support Digital ways of working.

15) Citizens have come to expect an easier interaction with organisations having been exposed to improved retail experiences online and the Authority needs to respond to that increased level of expectation.

16) Joining up services across traditional organisational boundaries to give citizens a better experience such as with the Brokerage which, was developed within the Authority, will increasingly become the norm and Digital ways of working support this.

17) There are some common areas between this strategy and the ICT Strategy especially in relation to the following:-

   A. Speed of change: In addition to that work, it is recognised that the Covid19 pandemic has had a significant impact on Technology and Digital. Some have been positive, such as the speedy adoption of Teams functionality. The associated benefits of enabling people to work from anywhere plus, supporting the estates strategy, would not have occurred at the speed it did had it not been for the situation that faced the Council. While that "critical emergency" pace could not be maintained, there is a desire to build on that level of acceptance of change, to support our citizens in the most effective and efficient manner, while recognising the balance to be made against risk of service outage.

   B. Technical Debt: There has also been some impact which, relate to the delay in technological upgrades, as ICT focused on maintaining service delivery for front line services. The opportunity should be taken to use Technical Debt as an agent for change rather than just replacing the existing old systems with new. This would involve commissioning reviewing the user journeys from end to end to establish the best interaction for our citizens and staff.

   C. Council Plan: The deployment of Digital services will be derived from the ICT workplan. This has been constructed from the perspective of supporting the Council plan which includes, reuse and integration to support digital ways of working, and putting the user at the heart of developing services and associated systems.

   D. Sustainability: All newly developed services and systems will look to be sustainable from an environmental perspective but also from an organisational perspective to reduce the level of technical debt that builds up within the Authority.

18) The Digital strategy will define the Target Technical Architecture for the Authority to enable services and systems to be developed in a way that use common

standards to make services more sustainable. In addition, it will define how systems interface with each other to support better integration of data which, should support more timely information to enable timely decisions.

## Other Considerations

19) There are other elements that are important but capacity dictates that they cannot be undertaken immediately. These are as follows:

   a. Data mastery will need to be resolved over time to enable a move to a position where data is entered once then used many times. Currently data is duplicated across systems, and this can cause reconciliation issues across systems. As we migrate to new systems, we will take the opportunity to resolve these issues and determine.

   b. This strategy will be underpinned by the ICT Strategy and will remain distinct and separate to enable the build momentum and skills that will be necessary for the Authority to become a Digital organisation.

   c. This strategy will seek to align with the Authorities transformational activity to create the maximum opportunity for business change utilising Digital methods.

   d. There are some Line of Business applications that will need replacing over the next 4 years due to their age, functionality, and multiple support issues. The replacement will be driven by business requirements and will conform to the strategy and seek to use the replacement as an agent for change rather than a direct replacement.

   e. Recognising that the Council's current financial position will also limit the amount of investment that we can make in any financial year.

## Reason for Recommendation

20) To set out the commitments and benefits that come with signing up to the Digital Declaration.

21) To support the development of systems and services that are easy to use and put the needs of our users at the heart of that development.

22) To support the workforce in the move to Digital ways of working.

23) To set out the Target Architecture for systems moving forward to ensure consistency and sustainability

24) To support the development of a consistent and robust Data strategy to support integration across systems and partners

25) To support the Authority in working across departments and its partners by defining end to end user journeys and making those seamless to our users.

**Statutory and Policy Implications**

26) Given central governments push to promote digital and joined up ways of working the strategy will look to build on and adopt common digital standards given the Authority has committed to in the Digital declaration.

27) Implications for Service Users

- Staff – The move to continuous upgrades will mean that an increased need for training which will, as much as possible, be provisioned online. However, it is recognised that for accessibility purposes there will be a need to provide a mix of appropriate training materials. In addition, we will work to include in the workforce strategy the advantages of digitalisation in relation to inefficient processes.

- Citizens – The development of services will be undertaken in a Digital manner and as such will be undertaken from a user perspective, making services user focused for Citizens to use plus, improve the interaction with partners. We will also take into consideration the equipment that has been distributed to citizens as a response to digitisation or Covid-19.

- Partners – The development of an integration platform is being specifically undertaken to enable the passing of relevant data between systems and partners to enable better, joined up services where that is appropriate.

**Timescales**

Once the Digital strategy is agreed, the Authority will look to adopt the principles, Target Technical Architecture, and the development of a Data strategy.

**Financial Implications**

28) Any additional demands that are identified as a result of this Digital strategy will follow the normal business planning process with any additional funding coming through a business case being submitted to Finance Committee in the normal manner.

**RECOMMENDATION**

29) That the Digital Strategy be agreed and adopted from May 2022.

**Paul Martin**
**Head of Technology & Digital, Finance, Infrastructure and Improvement**

**For any enquiries about this report please contact:**

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**Constitutional Comments (GMG – 26/04/22)**

30) This matter falls within the remit of the Finance Committee for decision.

**Financial Comments (SES 19/04/2022)**

31) There are no specific financial implications arising directly from this report.

**HR Comments (JP 2704/2022)**

32) Any HR implications are contained in the body of the report.

**Background Papers and Published Documents**

- See embedded links within the document

**Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected**

- All