

Thursday, 5 September 2024

**Report of the Leader of the Council / Assistant Director - People****ICT Strategy progress update****Exempt Information**

None

**Purpose**

The purpose of this report is to provide a high level, non-technical update on progress against the 5-year ICT Strategy approved by Cabinet in April 2021.

**Introduction**

The focus of the strategy which runs from 2021 to 2025 is the journey towards digital transformation as an organisation, supporting the vision, corporate plan and enabling associated transformational projects to drive innovation, efficiency and excellence across the Council. The upcoming corporate peer challenge has an underlying information and communication technology (ICT) theme, outcomes and recommendations from which will help inform the refresh of our ICT Strategy moving forward.

The strategy has 5 strategic ICT themes which remain key throughout its life, each has a set of activities that are key contributors to the delivery and success of the strategy and in turn, organisation transformation and modern, robust, and secure ICT infrastructure. This paper will provide a brief update on each of the strategic themes and associated activities as well as future plans and any potential disrupters to delivery of the strategy.

**Update by Strategic Theme****1. Digital by Design**

The focus of this theme is to deliver digital services enabling access for customers when and where they want whilst delivering efficiencies for the organisation. The Customer Portals were at the forefront of this theme, with the objective of moving more customer contact to digital channels. There have been significant challenges with MyTamworth Customer Portal, development of online processes in this platform is complex and has been challenging, resource intensive and time consuming, that said the team have made great progress recently with several new processes going live for customers including Report it, Taxi license, moves, Single Person Discount, and many website e-forms recreated from the old council website.

The limitations, challenges, and legacy architecture of the MyTamworth portal system, associated Electronic Document Management (EDRM) and Customer Relationship Management (CRM) systems we currently use will impact our ability to leverage the latest technology and flexibility of Cloud based services to continue our digital transformation. To ensure we continue to develop our digital offer for customers we have agreed budget to explore alternative solutions and work has already started on gathering requirements along with conversations with potential suppliers on modern customer portal and CRM systems. Technology in this area has moved on considerably, focused now on a 'low code' approach enabling simpler and quicker digital process transformation, system consolidation and single

customer conversation, reducing reliance on front to back-office rework. Many local authorities are starting to adopt this approach, and we have been keen to explore solutions which have a proven track record in delivering the kind of features and functionality that we want to provide.

To support new and existing housing tenants, we implemented the Housing customer portal. This offers our customers an online housing application process as well as online tenancy services once they become a tenant. We have also started to look at integrating online self-appointed repairs into the portal and new cloud-based services for housing allocations to understand associated benefits and efficiencies to improve the customer experience when applying for and being allocated council housing whilst improving efficiency of back-office processes.

Our Customer Services and Repairs Contact Centre is another area of focus for transformation. The current system is restricted to contact via phone, our customers are increasingly using other contact channels which are also more cost effective for the Council given appropriate technology to support this. We have been working on plans to implement an omnichannel contact centre solution to manage customer contact effectively and efficiently from email, webchat, webforms and socials to traditional phone, leveraging conversational/generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) and software robots (Robotic Process Automation) for repetitive, time-consuming tasks and handling standard customer enquiries, all contributing to reduced demand on customer service agents and improved service for our customers through accessible services 24/7 freeing resource to focus on vulnerable customers and those with more complex needs.

Electronic Document and Records Management (EDRM) is also an area which we're evolving as the current system is part of the existing on premise Civica environment. We are considering a proposal from Civica for migration to their new W3 cloud-based system and looking at other document management solutions to modernise and improve integration of EDRM. Ahead of any commitment, we're working with all service areas to understand full scope and use cases of the system to ensure an informed decision on provision of EDRM going forward.

Further progress has been made on the new web-based Environmental Health and Planning system, Assure. Phase 1 for Environmental Health (EH) – licensing, went live in April with food hygiene to follow from September along with phase 1 of Planning. The remaining EH modules will follow, and a full migration of Planning will be completed by December. Other service areas including Private Sector Housing, ASB, Street Scene and Land Charges are also in scope in line with our principles to consolidate our ICT systems and adopt a web-based application strategy.

We are currently working closely with His Majesty's Land Registry (HMLR) and the Land Charges/Planning teams to transition searches to a centralised HMLR service.

We are exploring ways we can make better use of existing systems without rework by our staff; examples include online Direct Debit set up via Academy and the development of Assure for online reporting of street issues.

## **2. Working Smarter**

There has been good progress on this theme. The earlier period of the strategy focused on enabling staff to effectively work remotely, implementing an estate of home-based end user technology that is modern and reliable including replacement of 250 desktops/laptops for home workers and 160 smart phones.

There has been increased use of Teams, SharePoint and OneDrive for improved staff and partner collaboration. This is being extended with a move of our shared (S) drive into SharePoint, with ICT data already migrated as a proof concept and all other service areas to follow enabling increased flexibility for staff accessing shared data and further reducing

reliance on our Infrastructure. We've rolled out Office 365 to our desktop and laptop estate and moved all Outlook mailboxes to Microsoft's cloud service.

We've also built several 'low code' based applications inhouse using agile development methods and Microsoft's Power Platform to transform back-office business processes including a mobile app for play park inspections, a web application for our Scheme Managers to record their resident visits, an app for demand capture in Customer Services and a diary application for HR to manage their time sensitive work. We are also working on a visitor/task management system for the post room currently in user testing, an asset tracking app for Street Scene, a tourism and local business database, an app to manage our Information Asset Register as well as looking at further business process automation using Microsoft Power Platform technology.

We've started to look at use cases and the art of the possible with Microsoft's Copilot. Several staff are already using the freely available version to help create outline reports and to reword and summarise passages of text along with other use cases. We are starting a proof of concept with Copilot for 365 and have a workshop planned with Microsoft to understand how Copilot can help change how we work and drive efficiency and productivity, building a prioritised plan for adoption.

In line with our cloud first strategy, iTrent HR and Payroll and Income Management systems have been migrated to the cloud-based software as a service, reducing demand on ICT teams for ongoing maintenance and allowing increased access flexibility and business continuity. ModGov will be moved to a cloud hosted service in the coming months and a new app introduced for members to access restricted reports, including report sign off.

We are currently implementing an upgrade to Orchard Housing to enable browser based mobile/remote access for staff, improving flexibility of access for housing officers away from the office.

We have enrolled all our laptops, desktops and mobile devices into the new Microsoft Cloud Endpoint Management system, Intune. This allows us to ensure devices based at home or mobile remain secure, kept up to date with security patches, software updates and rollout out new apps automatically without the inconvenience of regular device recalls.

We are starting work with a partner to implement Microsoft Teams Rooms into several meeting rooms in Marmion House with built in technology to enable group Teams meetings improving internal and external collaboration.

Next month we will be running a training needs analysis to understand Microsoft 365 skill levels and gaps across the organisation to target upskilling of staff to leverage full value and use from our Microsoft 365 licensing.

### **3. Better Use of Intelligence, Knowledge, and Insight**

Data is a valuable asset for the council and our currency to inform decisions and shape services.

There have been several key achievements in this theme. We've been working with Microsoft's Power BI reporting platform and produced a dashboard for Customer Services, continually reporting on customer interactions and telephony data to help inform demand resourcing. We've also been using Power BI for reporting on Sheltered Schemes data. There are many more use cases for Power BI which we're actively exploring.

Our in-house application development has been specifically designed to allow greater and more flexible reporting and interrogation of the data held in those systems, using Microsoft's cloud-based Dataverse and Power BI reporting helps us with this. Users will have the opportunity and tools to analyse and make informed decisions based on their data, which

would have been much more difficult to achieve in the past. This is an exciting development and opportunity where we are actively looking to increase skill levels in this area.

We have continued to achieve gold standard from Geo Place and earlier in the year, were awarded Platinum as part of the 2023 Exemplar Awards. Geo Place manage the central address data repository for the UK, and accuracy of our data is essential both for our systems and our submission obligations.

We are exploring use cases for data sets available as part of our subscription to LG Inform Plus to understand how this can help inform our decision making and shape our service provision.

Introduction of new CRM and Customer Portal systems and transformation of processes from back office to customer self-service with omnichannel contact history from a new Contact Centre system will give us improved data and insight into customer demand to help inform effective service delivery.

#### **4. Strong Governance, Security and Compliance**

This is a key area as we progress our digital transformation and consume more cloud-based services. There were some key ongoing activities and projects identified as part of this theme.

We've achieved ongoing annual Public Services Network (PSN) compliance ensuring we maintain access to critical services such as Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) Searchlight, we perform ongoing monthly network vulnerability scans and an annual external network health check and associated remediation work to strengthen our cyber security posture. We've also just started work with Local Digital on the new National Cyber Security Centre's Cyber Assessment Framework to further assess our cyber resilience. We also implemented a new network backup system with a cloud-based DR copy of our data.

We've refreshed our main perimeter firewall which protects our network from the internet, introducing cloud-based management.

We've maintained a strict regime of monthly security updates to our Microsoft server and desktop estate.

Our ICT governance policy framework has been completely refreshed to ensure our policies and procedures remain up to date and fit for purpose along with ongoing cyber security information and updates to raise staff awareness and we are working on an AI policy to ensure the organisation has appropriate governance in place for adoption of AI. Our cyber awareness training has proved successful, in our last two phishing tests targeting large numbers of staff, no staff revealed any sensitive information.

We have completed our Information Asset Register (IAR) and associated Record of Processing activity (ROPA) as part of our ongoing General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) compliance work and to understand what data sets we have and their purpose.

Projects coming up in this area include funded training for several internal ICT staff as cyber security practitioners, work towards organisational Payment Card Industry (PCI) compliance and implementing SharePoint information protection policies supporting the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) as part of our wider SharePoint adoption.

#### **5. Future Fit Technology**

The focus for this theme is maintaining a modern, flexible, and effective technology portfolio underpinning all the other themes with a Cloud first approach.

We've completed setup of our Azure landing Zone, essentially our Microsoft Cloud based data centre. This work was fully funded by our Microsoft partner and puts us in a ready state to move services off premise to cloud hosting. We've identified servers in scope for cloud hosting and secured budget to proceed. We have maintained existing server and storage infrastructure beyond expected life cycles, saving on capital investment but now need to bring that infrastructure up to date to meet capacity demand and in line with our Cloud first strategy, move in scope services to our Azure environment, reducing reliance on our own infrastructure and improving flexibility and business continuity. The first of these cloud-based services is set to be the council's website ensuring it remains available for customers 24/7.

Some of the work associated with this theme has been on hold whilst decisions are made on longer term office accommodation for the Council. To modernise our ICT infrastructure, keep pace with increased use of technology and ensure a stable, compliant and performant network, planning and design work for a complete refresh of our internal network has been completed and implementation will start in the coming months. This has been designed with flexibility to adapt to any potential accommodation change in the future. New desktop technology has also been planned for our offices, mini PC's and new modern screens will replace the legacy thin client estate enabling functionality such as desk-based Teams meetings when in the office, implementation will start in the coming months.

Work is also underway to modernise our back-office phone system. This will involve moving traditional landline calling into Teams and removing the need for physical handsets and the Mitel softphone, increasing flexibility for home, remote and office working and enabling better contact and collaboration between staff and improved business continuity.

Our Council Chamber will be refitted with a modern, hybrid-enabled audio-visual system to improve council meeting experiences for both Councillors and the public. The invitation to tender is out now with a planned implementation by November.

Our wide area network is being improved with an upgrade to depot connectivity, this is scheduled for completion in September.

## **Summary**

We have made significant progress on delivery of our 5-year ICT Strategy. We are now in a key phase where continued investment is required to modernise our ICT infrastructure and systems, adopt new technologies and gain insight from our data to continue to deliver the benefits which will make the biggest difference to service delivery for our customers and staff and keep pace with our digital transformation aspirations.

## **Equalities Implications**

See Appendix 1 – Community Impact Assessment – ICT Strategy update

## **Environment and Sustainability Implications (including climate change)**

Our ICT Strategy can actively contribute towards reducing carbon footprint and environmental impact whilst continuing to maximize efficiency and innovation.

- Energy Efficiency - our latest data centre infrastructure will be more energy efficient and require less cooling, moving more services to the cloud, optimized for energy efficiency and sustainability will also reduce our carbon footprint. Our endpoint device management system ensures energy efficient devices are configured to help reduce overall consumption
- Sustainable Procurement - prioritising the purchase of ICT products that are energy-efficient, have a longer lifespan, and are made from recyclable materials.

- Third Party Suppliers - working with suppliers who adhere to environmental standards and sustainable practices.
- Recycling and Reuse - programs for recycling and reusing ICT equipment to reduce waste.

### **Resource Implications**

Budget has been approved for the main key projects including Contact Centre, CRM, Customer Portal and EDRM system replacements, infrastructure refresh work and Council Chamber Audio Visual system replacement. We also have a level of ongoing revenue budget to fund forecasted Azure consumption charges for the initial cloud server migrations. Remaining projects will be funded from a combination of the existing ICT Technology Replacement capital scheme and where there are forecasted shortfalls, this will form part of budget process for 24/25.

Resource to deliver the projects will be provided by a combination of ICT staff and partner suppliers. Where partner resources are required, this will be included in the project budget.

### **Background Information**

None

### **Report Author**

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### **List of Background Papers**

ICT Strategy – available via

[https://www.tamworth.gov.uk/sites/default/files/foi\\_docs/Council%20%26%20Demo/ICT%20Strategy%202020-25.pdf](https://www.tamworth.gov.uk/sites/default/files/foi_docs/Council%20%26%20Demo/ICT%20Strategy%202020-25.pdf)

### **Appendices**

Appendix 1 – Community Impact Assessment – ICT Strategy update