

CORPORATE RESOURCES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting	Thursday 7 July 2022
Report Subject	Results of the Consultation on the Digital Strategy
Cabinet Member	Cabinet Member for Governance and Corporate Services including Health and Safety and Human Resources
Report Author	Chief Officer (Governance)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A draft version of The Council's refreshed Digital Strategy, Digital Flintshire 2021-2026 was approved by Cabinet in July 2021 pending consultation. The revised strategy incorporates our learning, experiences, growth and ambition since Digital Flintshire was first published in 2016. It also features, as a separate theme, the objective to help reduce the exclusion that can be suffered without access the skills, devices or connectivity needed to take advantage of digital services.

The strategy was sent to a wide range of stakeholder groups and a consultation was published on the website. 179 responses were received all of which indicated support for the strategic aims and ambitions of the Council.

Following consultation additional wording has been proposed to incorporate some elements of feedback and a draft response has been prepared for publication.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1	That the consultation results are welcomed, and that Committee advise of possible further actions in response to the representations received.
2	That the refreshed Digital Strategy for 2021-2026 is approved with the additional amendments suggested in this report.

REPORT DETAILS

1.00	EXPLAINING DIGITAL FLINTSHIRE
1.01	<p>The Council's draft Digital Strategy, Digital Flintshire 2021-2026, was approved at Cabinet in July 2021 and comprises of 8 main themes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Digital Customer• Digital Workforce• Digital Business and Connectivity• Digital Partnership• Information Management• Digital Delivery• Digital Inclusion• Digital Learning and Culture <p>Each theme is led by a senior manager and is underpinned by a set of core principles and high-level actions which are reflected within the Digital Strategy.</p> <p>The Digital Strategy Project Plan contains a list of all projects within the Digital Strategy which are assigned to a theme and reported against. It also collates the costs of the projects for the purposes of financial planning.</p> <p>The revised strategy is attached at Appendix 1.</p>
1.02	<p>Consultation was undertaken during the period November 1st, 2021, up until, and including January 31st, 2022.</p> <p>Consultation was open to all and undertaken by engaging with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Members of the public- Members of the workforce- Specific user groups identified <p>179 responses were collated with the majority of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing with the aims of the strategy.</p> <p>The digital interactive consultation document is attached at Appendix 2. A summary of the consultation responses is at Appendix 3 and the detailed responses are at Appendix 4.</p>
1.03	<p>Feedback indicated four main areas of focus for respondents. These areas are largely being addressed as part of cross-cutting projects or themes within the Digital Strategy and will continue to be prioritised as we progress.</p> <p>Planning and information</p> <p>Several responses suggested that there should be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Visibility of a roadmap and timescales for implementation• Transparency around costs and impacts on services

We will publish a roadmap for the strategy and continue to report on progress and updates via the Council's Digital Hub and blog posts periodically throughout the year. The Digital Strategy Project Plan includes tentative costings for all projects which will be fed into the Medium Term Financial Strategy.

Inclusion and accessibility

A high number of responses focussed on

- Ensuring people who cannot access online services are not excluded
- Helping people to engage in the digital world by helping to provide access to connections, devices and training

Digital Inclusion is a new wrap-around theme within the revised strategy and continues to be a primary consideration for all projects moving forwards, putting customers at the heart of service delivery. The Council's Digital Hub provides access to a wide range of resources including free training, access to devices and signposting to our Connects Centres, Libraries and other community initiatives. This programme of support will be further enhanced during this year to include dedicated volunteers trained to support people to engage in a digital world, complemented by digital surgeries within our Connects Centres.

To address digital poverty, our Connects Centres will also become "Online Centres" dedicated to supporting local communities including access to a national data bank. Flintshire is aiming to be the first Council in Wales to provide free data sims to people facing digital poverty in partnership with the Good Things Foundation.

The Social Services Workforce Development Strategy for 2022/23 has been shaped by the learnings taken from working practices adopted during the pandemic. It has led to the accelerated use of digital technology to deliver learning and development. The Workforce Development Team have included digital inclusion in their 2022/23 priorities and will be working to increase the digital skills of the social care workforce (both in-house staff and the wider independent and 3rd sector care workers). The team will be delivering digital skills workshops and increasing the availability of laptops and tablets to allow greater access to e-learning and virtual classroom session particularly for staff in the independent and 3rd sectors in Flintshire.

Connectivity

The highest number of responses said the Council should be

- Working to provide better connectivity in the County

Work on the LFFN programme is in the final stages with fibre ducting being installed in a steadily reducing number of remaining sites across the County. We are now focusing on the Digital Infrastructure element of the North Wales Growth Deal, seeking to ensure our residents, business and visitors have better connections throughout the County.

Website and service provision

A number of responses suggested we should be:

- Ensuring online services are easy to use

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensuring information online is up-to-date and relevant • Designing services based on customer needs <p>A website group has been re-established to ensure that the website is improved e.g. updating online content, and maintaining links. We will also continue to streamline and update the website, improve search functionality and ensure it is accessible across all devices (the majority of website hits are from smart phones). A forward work programme to review website content is being developed and will be supported by our Higher Level Trainees who have introduced modern ideas since the consultation including the Digital Hub and Elections Hub.</p>
1.04	<p>The Council has received significant investment (circa £5m) over the last 3 years from Welsh Government for infrastructure and devices in schools. This has given a huge boost to the delivery of IT skills as well as enabling the blended learning that was so essential during lockdown. The revised strategy already sets out our aspirations for improving the use of digital technology in schools, but it could be clearer on demarcation of responsibilities between the Council and the schools themselves.</p> <p>Further the revised strategy could be clearer on some aspects of the governance arrangements under the Digital Strategy Board.</p> <p>Additional wording to reflect these points is proposed for the revised strategy is at Appendix 5.</p>
1.05	<p>It is good practice to publish a response to consultations so that it clear to those who have taken the time to reply:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) whether the Council accepts their representations; 2) the extent to which their representations will be taken on board; and 3) how their representations have helped to shape the strategy <p>A draft response to the respondents is attached at Appendix 6.</p>

2.00	RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS
2.01	<p>Work is continually ongoing to ensure that the projects and ambitions within the strategy have accurate costings assigned with the Digital Project Plan. This will feed in to the Medium Term Financial Strategy and ensure that any potential funding gaps are identified as early as possible.</p> <p>It is already clear that the level of ambition within the Council and expectation from residents outstrips the available funding and capacity of the IT Service to support new projects alongside day-to-day delivery and necessary renewals of software/hardware (so called “keeping the lights on”). Only those projects which are a clear priority can be taken forward and portfolios will assist in prioritising and managing conflicting priorities.</p>
2.02	<p>The revised strategy contains the digital standards which ensure that only those projects which advance our strategic aims are progressed. Also, part of the role of the Digital Strategy Board is to assess the priority to be allocated to projects within available finance and IT capacity.</p>

2.03	Digital projects are also very demanding of transformation capacity within the services themselves so that existing work practices are amended to maximise the benefit that can be derived from any new software. Such projects need to be carefully dovetailed into the existing commitments of services to ensure that sufficient capacity exists and to minimise disruption to service users.
2.04	An action plan showing the start and end dates for projects is included within the revised strategy. This is a live document and is constantly adjusted in light of changing demands (such as emergencies or the previously unannounced termination of a piece of software). Portfolios are closely involved in ranking the importance of projects to help develop that sequencing plan.

3.00	IMPACT ASSESSMENT AND RISK MANAGEMENT	
3.01	Ways of Working (Sustainable Development) Principles Impact	
Long-term Prevention	Positive Recognising that our population is aging and becoming more diverse, digital services mean more focus can be given to supporting those more in need of support. Recognising the threat of climate change, more flexible working practices mean less journeys impacting on Co2 emissions and air quality.	
Integration	Easy access to information and ability to easily manage day-to-day tasks digitally can help people to be self-reliant and prevent loss of independence.	
Collaboration	Consultation results have underpinned the strategy and ongoing programmes of learning from feedback from citizens and users will inform future development.	
Involvement	Benefits across the wellbeing goals from improved digital services e.g. an equal Wales. Working with our partners to deliver digital services that enable Health and Social Care Integration e.g. Single Point of Access (SPOA).	
Well-being Goals Impact		
Prosperous Wales	Improving local infrastructure to support developing businesses. Helping local people gaining relevant skills.	

	Resilient Wales	Changing working practices and developing skills for more resilient services and communities as the population and climate changes in the long-term.
	Healthier Wales	Timely access to information to ensure support can be provided promptly preventing further deterioration, supported by real time information.
	More equal Wales	Flexible services, responsive to the needs of the most vulnerable.
	Cohesive Wales	Supporting improved internet connectivity so that information is easily and reliably available to enable all communities to be well-connected, informed and involved in their local area.
	Vibrant Wales	Ensuring all services and information are provided bilingually.
	Globally responsible Wales	More digital services reduces the need for journeys and resources such as fuel and paper, reducing Co2 emissions and use of resources.
Risks are logged, recorded and monitored by the Digital Strategy Board and included in the Corporate Risk Register where required.		

4.00	CONSULTATIONS REQUIRED/CARRIED OUT
4.01	A member briefing took place on 28 th June 2021. The strategy has been considered by the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee. As described within the body of the report there has been public consultation as well.

5.00	APPENDICES
5.01	Appendix 1 – Digital Flintshire 2021-2026 Appendix 2 – Digital Flintshire Interactive Document PDF Appendix 3 – Consultation Results – Executive Summary Appendix 4 – Consultation Results Appendix 5 – Digital Strategy 2021-2026 – Additional Wording Appendix 6 – Consultation Response

6.00	LIST OF ACCESSIBLE BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS
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6.01	<p>Digital Strategy for Wales – publication date 23 March 2021 https://gov.wales/digital-strategy-wales-html</p> <p>Local Digital Declaration - https://localdigital.gov.uk/declaration/</p> <p>Digital Flintshire Interactive - https://indd.adobe.com/view/f6f2bbb8-27e8-41a1-a566-32f5a0cddd08</p> <p>Digital Flintshire Hub - https://www.flintshire.gov.uk/en/Resident/Digital-Flintshire/Home.aspx</p> <p>Flintshire Digital Strategy - https://www.flintshire.gov.uk/en/Resident/Council-and-Democracy/Digital-Strategy.aspx</p> <p>The Hwb- https://hwb.gov.wales/</p>
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7.00	CONTACT OFFICER DETAILS
7.01	<p>Contact Officer: Lisa McQuaide – Project Manager Telephone: 01352 702357 E-mail: lisa.mcquaide@flintshire.gov.uk</p>
8.00	GLOSSARY OF TERMS
8.01	<p>DSB: Digital Strategy Board - chaired by the Chief Officer for Governance and comprised of theme leads and portfolio representatives from across the Council</p> <p>Theme Lead: a senior manager responsible for overseeing and reporting against any projects which are assigned to their theme</p> <p>LFFN Programme – Local Full Fibre Network: a national programme to implement high quality broadband connections to key public buildings and sites, especially in “not spots”. The ducting to those buildings enable them to be connected to fibre broadband thus improving their connectivity. Additionally, the spare capacity within the ducts can be used by private providers enabling them to offer packages to local business and residents. The network is county wide but it delivers significant benefits in laying ducting to areas where the cost of fibre installation might otherwise have been prohibitive.</p> <p>HWB Programme: a national programme to invest in schools IT infrastructure and technology. The aim is to increase digital standards in schools across Wales by investing in a standard level of provision.</p> <p>Medium Term Financial Strategy: a written strategy which gives a forecast of the financial resources which will be available to a Council for a given period and sets out plans for how best to deploy those resources to meet its priorities, duties and obligations.</p> <p>Capital Funding: Capital funding is usually utilised to acquire or improve a long-term asset such as equipment or buildings.</p> <p>Revenue Funding: is utilised for items that will be used within a year. Examples include salaries, heating, lighting, services and small items of equipment. Routine repairs are revenue expenditures and can include significant repairs that do not extend the life of the asset or do not improve the asset.</p> <p>EdTech (Education Technology): IT tools, technological implementations and digital practices in the classroom</p>