REPORT TO: CORPORATE COMMITTEE ON 29 AUGUST 2023

SUBJECT: ICT AND DIGITAL STRATEGY AND PLAN 2023-2026

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1. REASON FOR REPORT

1.1 To inform Committee of the progress made against the current Information and Communications Technology (ICT) and Digital Strategy and Plan and to consider the revised Strategy and Plan for the period 2023-2026.

1.2 This report is submitted to Committee in terms of Section III (B) (34) of the Council's Scheme of Administration relating to the development and implementation of information technology policies.

2. RECOMMENDATION

2.1 **It is recommended that Committee:**

    (i) Note the progress made against the 2020-23 ICT Plan (APPENDIX 1);and

    (ii) approve the ICT and Digital Strategy 2023-2026 (APPENDIX 2)

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 The Council's ICT and Digital Strategy and Plan set the direction and work required to respond to, support and achieve the priorities of the Council.

3.2 The ICT and Digital Strategy sets out how efficient and effective technology enables services to meet current and future service requirements in delivering the Council's priorities. The ICT and Digital Plan refers to the business needs within service departments and ensuring that the Council's systems and infrastructure are maintained and fit for purpose. The plan also helps ensure the sound management of ICT resources to maximum effect and efficiency.

3.3   The Strategy recognises the financial constraints within which the Council is operating, whilst at the same time continuing to enable development of improvements and modernisation through transformative activities. This includes supporting strategic and service priorities while seeking to contribute towards and enable long term sustainability.

3.4   Continued development of digital technologies will enhance service delivery both within and across different services. This includes, for example, digital inclusion and participation and seeking improvements in the use of data, improving the quality of data, more intelligent and automated use of data and improved skills in this regard.

3.5   Technological change is fast paced and dynamic. Keeping up with the rapid pace of change and requirement for digital developments to be intrinsic in the delivery of high quality public services brings both opportunities and challenges. Adoption of new technologies will be solution oriented, evidence based, provide value for money and have clearly defined outcomes to ensure that good decisions are made that enable robust planning allowing the Council to fully resource, implement and support any new digital investment.

3.6   To help inform the future vision and direction for digital technology and innovation within and across services, the Council is progressing through its first Digital Maturity Assessment, the outcome of which will be used to contribute towards guiding further developments. The report from the first Digital Maturity Assessment will be available from mid-autumn following which more detailed work will be undertaken to consider the outcomes and translate those into the action plan for further development.

3.7   As well as digital development, the ICT Service ensures that the current infrastructure and systems remain fit for purpose. The scale of behind the scenes work this involves is significant and forms a substantial part of the action plan. Examples of the type of work this involves are essential system upgrades, patches and fixes, server and network maintenance, contract management and support services to both corporate and education network users.

3.8   The other most significant area which has seen a much higher profile in recent years is cyber security and resilience. Cyber-attacks across a number of public sector bodies and other organisations have been well publicised. Other factors that are seen to raise the potential for increased risks are from geopolitical developments and the impact of a more dispersed workforce. The demands arising from this for the service have grown exponentially and this remains a critical area of focus for the ICT Service.

Progress on 2020-2023 Strategy and Plan

3.9 Progress has been made on the majority of the actions as follows.

Transformation:

Increased number of services available digitally to the public - these include Short Term Lets, Nursery Registration, 2-Year Old Registration. Now 89 services available online via e-Forms up from 54 in 2020/21, leading to 42,804 digital submissions in 2022/23. Other Services are also available to the public online e.g. Council Tax, Housing Rent / Points & Positions, Parents Portal etc.

Increased number of users of additional online services - see above plus Table 1 which illustrates the numbers of Councils Website Users, Sessions and Page Views have all increased between 2020/21 and 2022/23.

TABLE 1: Total Council web site usage stats for the last 3 years

Period	Users	Sessions	Page views
20/05/22 – 29/05/23	1,098,667	1,354,079	1,913,299
29/05/21 – 29/05/22	822,402	1,051,799	1,622,326
29/05/20 – 29/05/21	795,930	969,239	1,597,254

M365 - developed and implemented. The M365 project is now 71% completed and a roll out of the core solution is scheduled to take place by the end of October.

Roll out of hardware (e.g. laptops / phones) and software (e.g. Microsoft Teams) to support mobile and flexible working, and taking this work forward as part of the Smarter Working project.

When system contracts are being renewed the option of having that system hosted is considered and a move to the cloud is taken when there is a strong business case and a suitable risks / benefits return. e.g. Gladstone, M365, Parents Portal, Public-i.

Decision Support

Increased provision of Dashboards and automated reporting, Data Sharing work with DHI on Patient Personal Data Store, Teams Federation with NHS and other Councils.

Compliance

Accreditation work for both the corporate and education networks, implementation of an online learning platform to raise security awareness and to enable regular phishing simulation exercises.

Forward Planning

Support for the preparation of an updated ICT strategy for schools.

3.10 Additional demands have arisen due to a growing demand for digital from services to drive efficiencies and provide the public with a more streamlined service. There is also an increased number of upgrades and patches required on systems to ensure they remain secure. Opportunities from working in partnership with other Councils and Public bodies (DHI, NHS Federation, Digital Scotland etc.) are useful but do require an allocation of resource.

Further additional demands have come from the increase in cyber incidents and cyber security related work, unplanned work (e.g. replacement of the corporate anti-virus solution), supporting a much larger proportion of remote workers as support calls generally take longer, recruitment challenges and responding to the priorities of other services.

Proposed ICT and Digital Strategy 2023-2026 – Key Themes

3.11 The proposed ICT and Digital Strategy continues to build on the progress made to date and provides a sharper focus on the further development of the council's digital maturity through exploration, identification of and implementation of digital technology across services.   This includes technology that supports the virtual and collaborative nature of hybrid working, the use of Artificial Intelligence and Cloud services. Fundamental to this developing maturity will be proactive and positive engagement with services on potential digital developments for both current and new technologies.

3.12 Developments encompassed within the overall strategy which will carry a high priority include:

- Digital Developments - advancing technologies e.g. Artificial Intelligence, Power Apps, tools for increased collaboration
- Cyber Resilience
- Cloud Computing
- Intelligent Use of Data including further collaboration and shared access

3.13 Developments within Education are also key to maximising the use of digital inclusion in learning and teaching that will support improving attainment as well as providing positive skills and confidence that form a firm foundation for future employment and other positive destinations for our young people.

3.14 Demands related to cyber security and resilience have increased following a number of high-profile cyber-attacks on large public institutions, geo-political developments and the potential risks associated with increased remote working.   This is also reflected within the Strategy and Plan.

3.15 Working collaboratively with partners and developing our approach to enhanced use of data, including 'big' data, analytics and data sharing also gains prominence in the strategy and plan.

3.16   Taking account of the ongoing requirement to 'keep the lights on', ensuring the Council's ICT systems and infrastructure remain fit for purpose and compliant with appropriate standards also remains a core part of the proposed approach.

4.   **SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS**

(a)   **Corporate Plan and 10 Year Plan (Local Outcomes Improvement Plan (LOIP))**
The contents of this report are in accordance with the priorities set out in the Corporate Plan and set out how to make best use of technological resources to support the Council to meet current and future objectives and challenges.

(b)   **Policy and Legal**
None.

(c)   **Financial implications**
There are no immediate financial implications the pace of technological development is rapid and trends within the technological environment will be monitored for potential risk and impact e.g. the push from providers to move to Cloud based services.

In addition to this, ICT devices and infrastructure as a result of increased remote working will require to be maintained and replaced potentially at a faster rate than the previous desktop personal computer estate, therefore, in the medium term consideration of a revised rolling programme of maintenance will be required, which will have to be accommodated in the council's financial planning.

(d)   **Risk Implications**
The ICT and Digital Strategy and Plan are based on assessment of the issues and risks anticipated in relation to the council's technological requirements and identify actions to address these. The actions in the ICT plan have been prioritised and if necessary, activity will be reduced or ceased on those actions ranked lowest. Given the focus on transformation through responding to the Best Value Audit Report, budget related changes, modernisation and improvement it will be challenging for the ICT service to deliver on all of the work identified and so there is a risk of slippage that could have an impact on services. Any issues and proposed remediation will be identified for consideration CMT-SMT. The requirement for additional ICT support on an ongoing basis to support the number of mobile devices in use across the council (140% increase over the course of the pandemic) also remains a demand which continues to be monitored.

With reference to links with the ICT and digital developments within Education, the main objective is to ensure the ICT infrastructure is in a state of readiness to support further digital developments such as equitable access and digital learning environments to minimise the risks of further digital inequity and the consequent impact on learning and teaching, attainment and achievement.

(e)   Staffing Implications
There are no direct staffing implications arising from this report. However, it the resources required for the ICT service to deliver the actions in the ICT will be monitored carefully.

As the Council continues to respond to the pandemic, seeks to transform and modernise and prepares its financial plans, it is likely that specific technological issues will emerge. Account will be taken of the whole council strategic management of these technological issues as they emerge by involving the ICT team in the planning of the required changes.

(f)   Property
None.

(g)   Equalities/Socio Economic Impact
The ICT team continually monitor accessibility standards ensuring the internal and external websites are compliant.

(h)   Climate Change and Biodiversity Impacts
The ICT service is represented on the Council's Climate Change Board and works closely with the Climate Change Team to achieve actions in the Climate Change Action Plan. Supporting the move to increased remote working contributes towards the reduction of carbon emissions from commuter travel.

(i)   Consultations
CMT-SMT and Service Managers have been consulted on the draft documents and their views incorporated into the proposals. The report has also been circulated to Committee Services and comments incorporated.

5.   CONCLUSION

5.1   The ICT Section continues to enable efficient and effective service delivery and transformation. While there has been a particular focus on facilitating mobile and remote working for large numbers of the workforce more recently, there has also been progress in catching up on the backlog of work that resulted from the diversion of resources during from March 2020 through to approximately Autumn 2022 that were working on pandemic related impacts.

5.2   The ICT and Digital Strategy and Plan recognise the importance of making progress with enhanced use of digital technologies whilst maintaining business as usual systems, infrastructure and security.

5.3   The Committee is asked to approve the revised ICT and Digital Strategy 2023-2026 and supporting action plan which will be reviewed annually with services.