Cherwell District Council

Executive

3 July 2023

Cherwell Digital Futures Strategy

Report of ICT and Digital Lead

This report is public

Purpose of report

To present the Digital Futures Strategy, a forward-thinking blueprint designed to greatly improve the experience for all stakeholders - citizens, businesses, partners, visitors, staff, and elected members. Our strategy deviates from traditional IT strategies; instead of centring on specific technology implementations, we prioritise identifying innovative technologies and approaches that align with our ambition to become the best version of ourselves. Our aim is to leverage digital advancements to foster an improved, engaging, and seamless experience for all.

1.0   Recommendations

The meeting is recommended:

1.1   To approve the Digital Futures Strategy.

2.0   Introduction

2.1   As we adapt to an increasingly digital world, our strategies need to focus on utilising available technologies to fulfil our responsibilities and meet our goals. This approach will enhance the experience for citizens, businesses, partners, visitors, staff and future community members, regardless of digital proficiency, while maximising effectiveness, boosting efficiency and promoting accountability.

2.2   This digital strategy outlines how technology serves as a key enabler for our ongoing transformation programme, emphasising automation, digital solutions, data analytics, streamlined communication, and employee empowerment.

2.3   Through the implementation of a unified platform approach, we will deliver a seamless experience across all council services and incorporate advanced customer insights.

2.4   Our data and analytics strategy focuses on breaking down information barriers, using Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning (AI/ML) to gain insights across all

services. We'll work towards creating reliable, accurate data sources while enhancing transparency. User privacy and data security remain top priorities, adhering to GDPR guidelines and building robust security standards into our systems by design.

2.5   We'll deploy chatbots, robotic process automation, and other technologies as needed to improve customer experiences further and reduce manual tasks. By adopting this digital strategy, we can build upon our already strong service delivery, enabling our staff to concentrate even more on refining and enhancing the quality of council services. This will ensure we continue to excel in meeting and exceeding the expectations of those we serve.

2.6   To achieve these ambitious goals, we will be transforming our IT Services into a dynamic Digital and Innovation hub. This transformation will serve as the catalyst for driving technological advancements, fostering a culture of innovation, and, ultimately, enhancing the delivery of our council services to better meet the diverse needs of all stakeholders.

2.7   Our ultimate aim is to ensure that services are accessible to all, irrespective of digital literacy, age, gender, ethnicity, disability, or socioeconomic background, in line with the principles of equality and inclusivity that underpin UK society.

3.0   Report Details

3.1   Full details can be found in Appendix 1, "CDC Digital Futures Strategy".

3.2   The strategy outlines the following:
- A Definition of Digital
- Digital, a Vehicle of Transformation
- Our Digital Future for Cherwell (Strategy on a page)
- Current Digital Capabilities
- Focus on Security and Data Protection
- Technology and Infrastructure
- Initial Guiding Principles
- Enhancing Data Analytics - The outline of a Data and Analytics strategy
- Enhancing Transparency
- Digital Solutions – A Unified Platform approach
- Automation
- Streamlining Communications
- Empowering Staff
- Facilitating Council Members
- An overview of the new Target Operating Model for Digital and Innovation
- A technology availability roadmap

3.3   The full document also includes a glossary of terms and some examples of the approaches suggested.

4.0   Conclusion and Reasons for Recommendations

4.1 Embracing the digital approaches proposed in this strategy will align our services with the evolving expectations and daily digital interactions of our customers. By automating routine tasks, we empower our council officers to devote their expertise to more complex cases and to community members who would benefit from a more personal touch. Our commitment to gradual and strategic "evolution" rather than abrupt "revolution" allows us to manage the cost implications effectively. As such, most expenses related to the digital transformation will seamlessly integrate within our existing transformational budget or coincide with our planned system replacement schedules. This thoughtful approach ensures a smoother transition towards our digital future, minimising disruption while maximising benefits and value for our community.

5.0 Consultation

Leadership Team

Current IT Team regarding the formation of a new team called Digital and Innovation) who supported the proposal.

6.0 Alternative Options and Reasons for Rejection

6.1 The following alternative options have been identified and rejected for the reasons as set out below.

Option 1: To request the creation of a more traditional IT Strategy. Due to the drivers for transformation, a traditional IT Strategy would not provide the framework required to support radical change if needed.

7.0 Implications

Financial and Resource Implications

7.1 Focus is on maintaining or reducing the current spending on technology and the resources used to implement, support and maintain these resources. There will be a capital bid of £350,000 per year for the life of this strategy (2023 – 2026), to enable the implementation of new technologies and platforms, with the bulk of any costs coming from the transformation programme or system renewals (which will have individual capital bids).

Comments checked by:
Michael Furness, Assistant Director of Finance, 01295 221845,
Michael.Furness@cherwell-dc.gov.uk

Legal Implications

7.2 Any contracts related to new systems, platforms or technology will be reviewed and signed off by Legal as per their standard process. Also, as Information Governance falls under Legal, concerns related to data protection will be raised with them with

all new projects passing through the Data Process Impact assessment and Privacy assessment processes.

Comments checked by:
Shiraz Sheik; Assistant Director Law and Governance (Monitoring Officer), 01295 21651, Shiraz.sheik@cherwell-dc.gov.uk

Risk Implications

7.3   Due to the evolutionary approach described, there are no predicted risks. However, all project risks will be recorded and closely monitored.

Comments checked by:
 Shona Ware, Assistant Director of Customer Focus, 01295221652, shona.ware@cherwell-dc.gov.uk

Equalities and Inclusion Implications

7.4   The Digital Futures Strategy is not proposing potential savings directly, but the resulting transformation initiatives will be. We will therefore complete ECIAs for these proposals as they arise.

Comments checked by:
Shona Ware, Assistant Director of Customer Focus, 01295221652, shona.ware@cherwell-dc.gov.uk

Sustainability Implications

7.5   The Digital Futures Strategy has a Cloud Only principal, which will ensure we reduce our carbon footprint by removing the need for dedicated data centres. Any IoT devices implemented will be required to support solar or other renewable power sources. The future on demands reports and low-powered devices for all staff should also result in a reduction of printed materials.

Comments checked by:
Jo Miskin, Climate Action Manager, 07900 227103, jo.miskin@cherwell-dc.gov.uk

8.0   Decision Information

Key Decision

Financial Threshold Met: **Yes**

Community Impact Threshold Met: **Yes**

Wards Affected

All

Links to Corporate Plan and Policy Framework

All

Lead Councillor

Councillor Sandy Dallimore, Portfolio Holder for Corporate Services

Document Information
Appendix number and title
- Appendix 1 - CDC Digital Futures Strategy

Background papers
None

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