REPORT TO BUSINESS SERVICES COMMITTEE – 11 JANUARY 2024

ABERDEENSHIRE'S DIGITAL STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION UPDATE

1   **Executive Summary/Recommendations**

This report provides an update on the progress of Aberdeenshire's Digital Strategy which was previously reported to Business Services Committee on 8 June 2023, 12 January 2023, 23 June 2022, 6 January 2022 and 7 January 2021. An update report was also considered by Area Committees in September 2022, and previously a Bulletin was circulated to Area and Policy Committees during August/September 2021. This report details the holistic approach to delivering Aberdeenshire's Digital Strategy, setting out progress across the suite of projects which received funding under the Digital Strategy package of support approved by Council and delegated to the Business Services Committee in June 2021.

1.2   **The Committee is recommended to:**

1.2.1 **Consider and make comment on the update report; and**

1.2.2 **Note that an update will be issued to area committees via a briefing note.**

2   **Decision Making Route**

2.1   Aberdeenshire's Digital Strategy 2020-2025 builds on the achievements resulting from the 'Innovate Aberdeenshire' 2015-2020 Strategy.

2.2   Aberdeenshire's Digital Strategy 2020-2025 was approved by the Business Services Committee on 7 January 2021.

2.3   A progress update was previously circulated to all Area and Policy Committees during August/September 2021 and Area Committees during September 2022.

2.4   The most recent progress update was considered by Business Services Committee on 8th June 2023.

3   **Discussion**

3.1   Aberdeenshire's Digital Strategy sets out the priorities and continuing commitment to embedding our digital approach for Aberdeenshire contributing to delivering the council's strategic priorities.

3.2   Cross service engagement identified the digital enablers and interdependencies considered to have the greatest impact to strengthening the council's resilience and supporting communities. These formed the basis for developing an overarching business case securing £2m funding, approved by Council (24 June 2021), providing investment in those digital solutions contributing to removing barriers to providing citizens with increased choice in the way services are

accessed and increased the potential for improvements. An overview of each project, expected broad benefits and current progress is provided at **Appendix 1a**, along with an overview of the current Priority 1 Major Projects underway, to help illustrate the breadth of further activity ongoing at present. Although not funded by the Digital Strategy, these projects contribute to achieving the outcomes of the Digital Strategy for Aberdeenshire.

3.3 The digital strategy programme delivery is the responsibility of the Business Change Team. The team ensures the programmes are investigated, defined and technically accurate in addition to identifying and managing key risks, dependencies and issues. The Business Change team manage the delivery of the project resources (across IT technical teams and project stakeholders) and ensure that projects are delivered to scope including time, cost and quality. The Digital Programme colleagues work together with Change Team and project stakeholders to ensure critical change readiness, benefits plans and adoption of new technology are embedded to ensure project success. Business Change report to the Digital Strategy Board on programme progress, issues or where key strategic decisions are required.

The strategy is well into its delivery, and we are now seeing the conclusion of several projects, with all others moving through their final Discovery or Delivery stages (see appendix 1B for a visual breakdown of project status). The programme continues to receive broad support as it seeks to deliver meaningful efficiency or effectiveness change through its suite of projects.

As part of the transformation programme (agreed by full council in November 2023) a Data, Digital and Technology workstream was agreed. Officers will use the learning from the delivery of the Digital Strategy to inform activity and over time will consider how to transition into the new workstream to ensure there is no duplication or crossover of effort.

3.4 The programme includes three pilot style projects which were intended to test concepts for further investment. These are the review of a Master Data Management solution, a pilot around digital enablement for our front line colleagues and Internet of Things sensor network

Internet Of Things

Following conclusion of the trials it was found that sensors in some areas were providing meaningful and important data which helped real-time decisions to be made. A report is currently being drafted to detail findings with consideration of the associated risks and costs.

One of the successful trials focused on monitoring damp levels in properties and Housing having seen benefit from these sensors. They are keen to continue with sensors in all housing stock to monitor for damp and mould. The Service are investigating alternative solutions to identify best value for the council and decide on how to move forward.

<u>Master Data Management</u>

Following a successful implementation of data sharing between the first two core systems the pilot has received approval to begin reviewing the next core business system to bring on board.

This first stage assures customer data contained in our Council Tax system and our Customer Services system remains consistent and flags changes between the two. The next system to investigate joining the MDM solution will be Housing.

The more systems brought in to share data with each other the more accurate and joined up our data will be, meaning data starts to be viewed as a powerful asset that can be trusted.

Benefits for this piece of work are centered around two main themes, benefits for our customers and benefits for our organisation. Having accurate and trusted data ensures we are communicating between services when changes happen, such as changes of name or address reducing the need to contact us more than once with any changes. It also reduces administration within the council, allowing us to proceed with data we trust rather than check for changes in alternative systems.

<u>Digital Solutions for Frontline Colleagues</u>

Recommendations from the pilot surfaced some opportunity for the use of digital tools such as Office 365 and specifically we saw real potential benefit within Live Life Aberdeenshire through the use of Microsoft Shifts.

The decision to add these capabilities to our IT Service Catalogue to allow services to purchase licenses for their staff concluded the pilot and we continue to investigate solutions for time booking and timesheets through other project channels.

3.5 A maturing benefits profile continues to emerge across the programme, with Return on Investment ROI identified across Webchat, Process Automation and Online Services indicating potential ROI by 2025.

Process Automation has delivered eight live processes to date and achieved cash benefits with the potential for these savings to grow with further opportunities for the project pipeline. Having delivered these processes we will now conduct a review of our delivered capability so far, assess what we have learned and ask for recommendations on future direction from Digital Strategy Board.

Two further streams are producing tangible financial savings. One of these streams have concluded - Webchat – where a reduction in posts translates to 4 FTE saving with the potential for this number to grow with further refinement of the chat solution. The other is our Online Services Programme – aiming to digitise processes bringing them online and improving those which already exist. Currently the programme is preparing for online council tax billing and reviewing Road Fault Reporting.

Table 1 highlights the financial value associated with these savings:

Project	Budget	Return on Investment to date
Webchat	£91,643	£144,982
Process Automation	£667,000	£74,760
Online Services- My Aberdeenshire	£162,750	£51,548

Wider benefits exist as these projects support the organisation in its transformation journey supporting Aberdeenshire to become more efficient and streamlined in its processes and maximising the transaction channel choice for both internal and external stakeholders.

We also have several projects which do not offer measurable ROI benefits profiles due to their nature, eg, Cyber security and compliance and Building Digital Skills, but have wider benefits in terms of offsetting potential significant financial and operational impact through cyber-attack and ensuring our workforce has the right level of skills and capability to leverage existing and emerging technology (**Appendix 1D**).

3.6   The potential for benefits realisation is one predicated on full support from services, to ensure the delivery of digital capability is properly and consistently adopted, embedded and exploited. In addition to supporting the realisation of process change and efficiency directly, the digital strategy is supporting the pathway to change more broadly. The opportunity for change enabled by leveraging digital technology should be embedded into service workforce plans as the organisation evolves its roles and service delivery models. Recent conversations in one service for example, have highlighted that a decision to support VS applications was directly enabled by the impact of the online services project, however, this was not originally attributed to the digital strategy and the challenge remains of how to identify and report on such changes in the wider organisation.

Further examples of this are

- Online Services supporting Short Term Lets applications avoiding the need for recruitment of 3 FTE
- Online Chat providing time saving opportunities in order to provide swifter response times
- Automating time consuming processes which allow staff to focus on additional more complex responsibilities

The digital strategy is a key enabler of the workforce planning approach at Aberdeenshire and several of the projects are helping the organisation to evolve, becoming more effective in its processes and service delivery, freeing up resource to focus on identified priorities. The impact these projects have can be seen in **Appendix 1C**.

Our non digital strategy funded Major projects we continue to report on to Board for information which include the replacement of the LLA service's management system Gladstone, which has a significant emerging benefits profile, and the Council Tax Online Billing Module which is being managed as part of Online Services and is due to be launched early 2024 and has a separate emerging benefits profile.

3.7 The projected spend profile for the programme (**Appendix 1E**) helps to illustrate that as projects are now moving through the last 1.5 years of the 5 year plan. With this increase in spend we have seen clear evidence of increasing effectiveness throughout our services making processes such as creating and managing shift, committee reporting, communicating with our customers and improving our data quality. Increasing spend also means the projections for ROI continue to increase in forecasting reports (**Appendix 1F**).

3.8 Digital access and inclusion plays an important role in the success of our Digital Strategy. The Digital Inclusion workstream continues to make progress with the cross-service group, including representation from Aberdeenshire Health and Social Care Partnership. This continues to build a shared understanding of those amongst our communities who are experiencing digital exclusion. A shared Communications Strategy and Plan is being developed to ensure a planned approach to communicating and engaging with communities. The group continue to jointly develop and deliver an action plan to address the 4 key areas of digital inclusion:

– Digital Connectivity – infrastructure and/or access to connectivity
– Digital Access – Equipment and affordability of digital access
– Digital confidence – Developing skills and opportunities
– Hybrid Solutions – Support and alternative solutions for excluded groups

3.9 The Digital Engagement Team within Economic Development continues to deliver activity and projects to improve digital connectivity in Aberdeenshire. The team is leading work on behalf of the Aberdeenshire Council and the Aberdeen City Region Deal to lobby for further intervention to improve broadband infrastructure from UK Government through Project Gigabit, which is expected to open procurement lots in Scotland by the end of the calendar year 2023. Engagement with stakeholders is also being focused on for the Shared Rural Network programme which will increase 4G mobile coverage across the Region. Work with Scottish Government continues to promote and stimulate demand in the Reaching 100% Programme and Scottish Broadband Voucher Scheme, with Aberdeenshire continuing to see the highest number of interventions and deployment of voucher projects in Scotland. Additionally, Aberdeenshire will have some of the highest level of deployment of full-fibre through the Reaching 100% Programme in the coming year. Further information and statistics on the R100 Programme in Aberdeenshire is provided at **Appendix 2**.

3.10 In financial year 2023/24, the Digital Engagement Team has directly supported nearly 2,000 premises to date in matters relating to digital connectivity, including both residential and commercial premises. Over 90% of enquiries have been resolved with a positive outcome, improving digital connectivity. The team has

held 12 public events and sessions to support communities and stakeholders in digital connectivity improvements. The team also continues to publish the monthly Digital Engagement Newsletter, promoting the work being done across all streams of work.

3.11 Since the appointment of Aberdeenshire's first Service Designer in January 2022 Service Design embedding activities have continued with the design and delivery of a Service Design Awareness Training course now available through ALDO with courses running monthly. By the end of 2023 we will have trained 68 colleagues. A Systems Thinking Course has also been designed and is ready for testing with participants in 2024 before adding to ALDO, all linked and referenced within a refreshed Service Design Sharepoint site. Service Design has been used to support interventions and co-design activities within Environment & Infrastructure Support Services, ECS/Children Services, Property and Facilities, Live Life Aberdeenshire, Finance and Customer Services. Service Design methods and the Service Designer himself has actively supported the shaping of the Transformation Programme through the design and delivery of the 6 summer workshops - including Elected Members and lately in the review of cost saving opportunities with Chief Officers.

3.12 The Digital Skills team have been making significant progress. Monthly Digital Champions meetings resumed at the beginning in May focusing on innovation, skills development and engagement between champions. The Digital Workforce Sharepoint site was launched and the first annual Digital Maturity Assessment survey (DMA) was carried out (report expected Jan 2024).

The Digital skills 'Learning Pathways' site is now in testing (in partnership with NHS & Digital Office), offering a range of digital learning & training opportunities. A Digital Training Needs Analysis tool is being developed supporting staff to identify the appropriate MS tool for their work; estimated Go Live is March 2024. An ALDO 'managers passport' course is being developed, emphasising digital tools and leadership expectations. Digital Skills clinics will launch early 2024, with ALDO courses on relevant topics. An MS partner to support Digital Champions is being procured (anticipated award Dec 2023). A Digital Champions recruitment campaign is planned (training beginning early 2024. The team is liaising with IT/Microsoft in reviewing Centre of Excellence platform; reviewing governance of citizen development guidelines and protocols.

4 Council Priorities, Implications and Risk

4.1 Aberdeenshire's Digital Strategy impacts across all pillars and priorities:

Pillar	Priority
Our People	Learning for Life Health & Wellbeing
Our Environment	Climate Change Resilient Communities
Our Economy	Economic Growth Infrastructure and public assets

The Strategy promotes the key principles that underpin the Pillars and Priorities tackling poverty and inequalities and digital infrastructure and economy.

4.2   The table below shows whether risks and implications apply if the recommendations are agreed.

Subject	Yes	No	N/A
Financial		X	
Staffing		X	
Equalities and Fairer Duty Scotland			X
Children and Young People's Rights and Wellbeing			X
Climate Change and Sustainability			X
Health and Wellbeing			X
Town Centre First			X

4.3   There are no financial or staffing implications arising directly from the content of this update report. £2m was allocated to Digital Strategy and Officers will ensure this is not exceeded through careful financial management. Savings are being realised by services as a result of the investment being made.

4.4   The screening section as part of Stage One of the Integrated Impact Assessment process has not identified the requirement for any further detailed assessments to be undertaken because the Committee is only being asked to note the progress to date and there will be no differential impact as a result of this update.

4.5   No additional risks have been identified as relevant to this matter on a Corporate Level as the purpose of the report is only to inform the Committee of the actions being taken forward since Aberdeenshire's Digital Strategy was approved on 7 January 2021.

5   Scheme of Governance

5.1   The Head of Finance and Monitoring Officer within Business Services have been consulted in the preparation of this report and their comments have been incorporated into this report. They are satisfied that the report complies with the Scheme of Governance and relevant legislation.

5.2   The Committee is able to consider and take a decision on this item in terms of Section C 1.1b and g of the List of Committee Powers in Part 2A of the Scheme of Governance as it relates to matters within the remit of Customer Communication and Improvement and Information and Communication Technology.

Rob Simpson
Director of Business Services

Report prepared by Kerry Thorneycroft, Digital Programme Team Leader
Date: 6h December 2023

List of Appendices*:*

Appendix 1A - Digital Strategy and Priority 1 Major Project progress
Appendix 1B - Digital Strategy Programme - status update at a glance
Appendix 1C - The Impact of the Digital Strategy on people
Appendix 1D - Effectiveness V Efficiency
Appendix 1E - Digital Strategy Spend Forecast
Appendix 1F - Digital Strategy Measurable Benefit Forecast
Appendix 2 - R100 Information & Statistics