Minutes

Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee

Date: 8 September 2023

Time: 10.00 am

Present: Councillors P Hourahine (Chair), M Al-Nuaimi, B Davies, G Horton, P Bright, C Baker-Westhead, S Cocks, M Evans and L James

In Attendance: Tracy McKim (Head of People, Policy and Transformation), Mark Bleazard (Digital Services Manager), Dominic Gibbons (Digital Projects Manager), Tariq Slaoui (Information Manager) Councillor Dimitri Batrouni (Cabinet Member for Organisational Transformation), Samantha Turnbull (Digital Projects Manager)

Apologies: Rhys Cornwall (Strategic Director for Transformation and Corporate)

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1   **Declarations of Interest**

None.

2   **Minutes of the previous meeting held on 28th July 2023**

The minutes of the previous meeting held on the **28th July 2023** were agreed as a **true and accurate record**.

The Committee queried whether there had been an update on the letter to the University.
- The Head of People, Policy and Transformation (PPT) confirmed that the letter had been sent by the Strategic Director for Transformation and Corporate.
- The Committee requested a copy of the letter.

The Committee thanked the Head of PPT for the update on training provision and asked when the single log on would be put into effect.
- The Head of PPT noted that there had been work carried out to make the NHS training platform more user-friendly and stated that Committee would be given a further update in future.
- The Digital Services Manager stated that the single log on function was currently undergoing work but that they were unable to provide a timeframe for completion.

3   **Annual Digital Report 22-23**

Invitees:
Tracy McKim - Head of People, Policy and Transformation (PPT)
Mark Bleazard - Digital Services Manager
Dominic Gibbons - Digital Projects Manager
Tariq Slaoui - Information Manager

This document is available in welsh / Mae's ffurflen hon ar gael yn Gymraeg

Samantha Turnbull – Digital Projects Manager
Councillor Dimitri Batrouni - Cabinet Member for Organisational Transformation
The Head of PPT introduced the report and the Digital Services Manager gave a summary of the report.

Questions:
The Committee complimented the reporting style and version control.
The Committee queried whether a partner with a good experience with UX had been chosen to work on the website redevelopment project. The Committee queried whether the new website's accessibility and usability had also been considered in the brief and whether this is something that would be checked regularly.

- The Digital Services Manager noted the partner was chosen via a procurement process that highlighted accessibility, usability and sustainability as a requirement and added that they had been pleasantly surprised with the work of the chosen supplier.
- The Head of PPT stated that although the current website was not optimal, it was compliant in terms of accessibility. The Head of PPT noted that they had queried planned colours to ensure there are accessibility options and added that they would be happy to share examples of websites that the project aspired to reach the quality of.

The Committee noted that the website redevelopment would only be optimal if the management and content of the website was kept up to date.

- The Head of PPT highlighted that they had been working with service areas so that experts in that area would be responsible for their respective website content and its maintenance.
- The Digital Services Manager added that technology could be a barrier and that the hope was the redevelopment would remove some barriers.
- The Digital Projects Manager stated that there had been work done regarding integration and that some aspects would be automated as they wished for the service to be streamlined and more efficient.

The Committee queried whether service area experts were the best people to oversee what information should be included in the website content.

- The Head of PPT informed committee that the Communications team would still be responsible for the website but with specialist assistance from service areas. The Head of PPT also highlighted that they were requesting people to join an online forum on the website development.

The Committee queried whether there would be continuity between the app, the mobile webpage and desktop webpage and how would these link together.

- The Head of PPT noted that the redevelopment was focused on the website rather than the app but highlighted that there would be a Customer Services review to highlight how residents interact and contacted the Council which would inform future work.
- The Digital Services Manager assured Committee that the website would be optimised for those accessing it via a mobile device.
- The Digital Projects Manager confirmed that the optimising the website for mobile devices was included within the brief.

The Committee queried whether data would be collected on how people engaged with the Council and would it show the type of device used.

- The Digital Services Manager noted that it was likely to be included and added that the tool was able to see geographical data.

The Cabinet Member thanked the committee for their questions and stated that the website redevelopment was an important project. The Cabinet Member highlighted that integration was imperative and added that they were consulting with the public, but systemic learning and collecting the right data was important to understand what residents want and need, and how NCC can provide that. The Cabinet Member noted that the work being undertaken would ensure that Newport is fit for the future. The Cabinet Member welcomed all scrutiny and questions to help drive improvement.

The Committee commended the executive summary and reporting style. The Committee noted that the SRS query response times have often been very long or have had complex responses and queried whether this could be streamlined.

- The Digital Services Manager noted that there is a prioritisation system meaning that the less major problems would be given a longer response time and added that issues can be manually escalated in some cases. The Digital Services Manager added that in many cases, issues were resolved prior to the date given.
- The Digital Projects Manager added that they try to strike a balance between managing expectations and addressing issues.
- The Committee noted that the times seemed too long even in non-essential cases.
- The Head of PPT noted that the response times had improved but that the reliance on technology has grown simultaneously and added that this type of query would be picked up in the review in another committee meeting in future.

The Committee asked whether using third parties to provide training was cost effective and the best use of staff time.

- The Head of PPT noted that after feedback from local authorities, the NHS had provided them access to technical files to improve accessibility and usability. The Head of PPT stated that they were not prioritising money over the importance of training and added that there had been work done on staff training records. The Head of PPT noted that there was some in-house training but that external providers were inevitable due to the range of training required across the organisation.
- The Digital Projects Manager noted that the NHS, SRS and the Digital team had been working on the single sign in project.

The Committee noted the roll out of Microsoft Teams phone and queried whether there would be a default to audio when using it.

- The Digital Services Manager noted that employees were now familiar with the chat and video call features within Teams. The Digital Services Manager added for external calls, the expectation would be audio only and internally, while there was no process, it was common practice for audio and video calls. The Digital Services Manger noted that a benefit would be that there was not a requirement for a handset.

The Committee queried how were they going to monitor the effectiveness of the website to be able to identify areas that need improvement. The Committee asked whether any areas have been identified that require improvement to make the website the more attractive to residents in finding information and reporting issues.

- The Head of PPT stated that work had been undertaken with Customer Services to look at customer contact outside of this report which would look at with this.
- The Cabinet Member noted that the website was not as easy to use as it could be which the review would help address.

The Committee noted that in the move towards digital solutions, it was important to consider inclusion and accessibility for residents who were less digitally skilled. The Committee felt that some groups may be marginalised by this move and praised the digital skills courses and other opportunities provided to the public to address this but asked whether there had been data collected on uptake and the demographics of this uptake.

- The Digital Services Manager noted the importance of digital skills and inclusion and stated that partnership work had also been done with external groups in this area.

- The Digital Projects Manager highlighted the Council's accreditation in the Digital Inclusion Charter and noted there had been a variety of courses provided across different locations to ensure accessibility and added that staff had been trained in signposting. The Digital Projects Manager added that as well as the courses they had been raising awareness at other events such as cost of living events to increase visibility.
- The Digital Services Manager explained to the Committee that there had been internal and external partnership working to increase awareness.
- The Committee noted the importance of monitoring whether the strategies in place are working effectively to prevent exclusion.
- The Digital Services Manager noted the report and strategy would make the work being done more visible and allow for scrutiny. The Digital Services Manager stated that although they had so far had limited success, it was a new project and annual would highlight relevant themes and outcomes.
- The Digital Projects Manager informed the Committee they aimed to gather and report against statistics to provide a benchmark.

The Committee noted the importance of the digital strategy covering all areas of the Council and asked how they had ensured this.
- The Head of PPT stated that this was the reason for the strategy and explained that although it was not a statutory requirement, it allowed for accountability.
- The Digital Services Manager stated that officers would have been made aware of available technology but that it would be down to the service areas to embrace it.
- The Head of PPT noted that there was a focus on digital skills in an upcoming People and Partnerships Plan and highlighted the Digital Champions.
- The Digital Projects Manager informed the Committee that Digital Champions' role was to help test the use of new technology or strategies prior to roll out as well as reporting back on issues to allow the team to find solutions by working backwards.
- The Digital Services Manager added that there was a plan to enhance the role of the Digital Champions.

Th Committee noted the collaboration between local authorities in the Intelligence Hub project and queried whether there was any further scope for collaboration to save resources and money.
- The Head of PPT stated that there was but that the mechanisms would need to be worked out. The Head of PPT felt that collaboration between groups within the organisation had led to better working.
- The Cabinet Member explained that data was most useful when taken from large and varied data sets and highlighted that collaboration would allow for local authorities to provide better services. The Cabinet Member informed Committee that data sharing was in place with Monmouthshire and that there was a plan to expand this to further local authorities.

The Committee highlighted that there were residents who did not own a mobile phone or laptop and felt that while there was assistance at libraries, that some residents did not want to engage with these services.
- The Digital Services Manager highlighted the importance of digital skills and inclusion and stated that while they provide courses and support, there was only a limited level of support they could provide.
- The Digital Projects Manager felt that it was important that digital support could come from anyone that a resident encountered when interacting with NCC employees to increase confidence and signpost. The Digital Projects Manager noted that a gap in training regarding low level skills had been identified and addressed and highlighted the importance of signposting. The Digital Projects Manager agreed that they would provide information to the Committee on this.

The Committee asked where they believed the Council would be in a few years regarding this Strategy.

- The Digital Services Manager noted that this was shown in the outcomes within the report. The Digital Services Manager informed Committee that these were varied and challenging and would be a tool to measure against but highlighted that unforeseen challenges would arise.

Conclusions:
- The Committee thanked Officers for the report and commended the reporting style and version control.
- The Committee highlighted the importance of considering inclusion and accessibility requirements when developing the website.
- The Committee highlighted accessibility as an important factor to be considered when developing training.
- The Committee welcomed the Officer's suggestion to provide examples of websites that show the good practice the project is aspiring to deliver.
- The Committee asked for resources regarding digital inclusion and skills so that they could signpost residents to them where appropriate.

The Committee recommended that a section highlighting the progress made on the website redesign, and containing meaningful metrics and information, is included in the next Annual Digital Report. The Committee also requested an update on the progress of the website redesign in six month's time.

4   **Scrutiny Adviser Reports**

a) Actions Arising (Appendix 1)
The Scrutiny Advisor noted that responses had been chased regarding outstanding actions.

b) Forward Work Programme Update (Appendix 2)

The Scrutiny Advisor informed the Committee that 2 items had been added to the Forward Work Programme after the agenda had been published – the People and Culture Plan and the Asset Plan.

5   **Live Event**

Click here to watch the recording.

The meeting terminated at Time Not Specified