

Report

Cabinet

Part 1

Date: 18 September 2024

Subject Annual Digital Report 2023-24

Purpose To provide an update on the Digital Strategy and note progress made

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Head of People, Policy and Transformation

Ward General

Summary Digital technology plays a critically important role in effective and efficient service delivery for organisations and Newport City Council relies heavily on this for effective day to day operation. The development of the Council's Digital Strategy 2022-2027 sets the strategic vision for the use of digital technology across the organisation. The strategy has four themes: Digital Transformation, Digital Skills and Inclusion, Data and Collaboration and Digital Infrastructure and Connectivity. These themes have been developed to align with the Council's Corporate Plan.

The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the Digital Strategy against the desired outcomes and actions. This is the fifth Annual Digital Report but the first full year since the Digital Strategy's was formally adopted by the organisation. As such, this report is focused on the delivery of the strategy and its associated outcomes. It is focused at a strategic level and the differences made to service delivery. This includes achievements highlighted in digital transformation and automation, supporting the Council to become even more efficient and better able to meet the needs of Newport residents and businesses.

Proposal To endorse the Annual Digital Report 2023-24 and proposed actions.

Action by Digital Services Manager
Transformation and Intelligence Manager
Head of People, Policy and Transformation

Timetable As reported

This report was prepared after consultation with:

- Head of Law and Standards – Monitoring Officer, and Senior Information Risk Owner (SIRO)
- Head of Finance – Chief Financial Officer
- Head of People, Policy and Transformation
- Digital Board officer group

Signed

Background

Digital technology plays a critically important role in effective and efficient service delivery for organisations and Newport City Council relies heavily on this for effective day to day operation. The development of the Council's Digital Strategy 2022-2027 sets the strategic vision for the use of digital technology across the organisation.

The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the Digital Strategy in terms of progress made against the desired outcomes and actions. Whilst the principles and themes of the strategy remain, the outcomes and actions will be dynamic, driven by opportunities and changes in digital technology. As an example, Artificial Intelligence (AI) and automation technologies provide opportunities that need to be embraced and these have been a focus this year.

The benefits of the report are as follows:

- To report progress on the Digital Strategy by theme
- To highlight outcomes achieved and those that need more work
- To identify opportunities, address weaknesses and update desired outcomes and actions
- To document stakeholders and address their needs
- To record the benefits realised as part of the delivery of the Digital Strategy

It complements the Annual Information Risk Report which is more detailed with a slightly different purpose and audience.

The strategy is a key component of the delivery of the Council's Corporate Plan's aspirations for digital infrastructure, skills and services and will be an important underpin for data-driven transformation of services and changes to services, such as automation.

Report

This is attached as appendix to this Report and includes an Executive Summary of key highlights. Good progress has been made in the delivery of the outcomes of the Digital Strategy. The Digital Transformation and Data and Collaboration themes are the most developed, reflecting the outcomes for which the Council has the greatest amount of control and influence. The Digital Skills and Inclusion and Digital Infrastructure and Connectivity themes are more dependent on other stakeholders and require a joined-up approach.

The achievements highlighted in digital transformation and automation are important in supporting the council to become even more efficient and better able to meet the needs of Newport residents and businesses.

The report covers:

Digital Strategy Progress Update

Digital Transformation

This theme is especially aligned to the principles of innovation, user centred and green. Below are details of progress made against various outcomes identified in this theme:-

- The Council with other SRS partners has been testing out the opportunities for Artificial Intelligence (AI) using Microsoft CoPilot and a future business case is being developed
- Further opportunities for the use of Robotic Process Automation (RPA) have been developed most notably significant work in Housing and Communities
- A "Smart Hub" facility in Newport Market was set up to promote and demonstrate how technology can help support more independent living. The plan is to move this to the Central Library site
- The first phase of the redevelopment of the Council's website www.newport.gov.uk went live in February 2024 including the home page and priority areas. This is now fully bilingual, meets design and accessibility standards and is a major improvement over the old website

- A customer contact review took place during the year and this will provide recommendations on improving customer contact with the Council
- The Council's migration to a cloud-based solution for its financial system went live April 2024. With the IDOX Uniform migration nearly all the Council's highest priority IT systems are in the cloud

Digital Skills and Inclusion

This theme is especially aligned to the principles of inclusive and collaborative. Below are details of progress made against various outcomes identified in this theme:-

- The Adult and Community learning service continues to deliver digital skills courses as part of its offering
- Libraries and Hubs continue to provide free access to devices for citizens
- The Council continues to provide free public Wi-Fi at about 50 sites across the city many of which have been migrated to an SRS provided solution to remove duplication and realise savings
- We also contribute to Newport Transport's free bus Wi-Fi service
- The Council continues its membership of key groups such as the Digital Inclusion Alliance Wales and the Right Skills Board highlighting the need to work collaboratively
- Initial work took place on the development of workforce assessment tools to capture the current level of skills to inform the skill development requirements

Data and Collaboration

This theme is especially aligned to the principles of collaborative, secure and data driven. Below are details of progress made against various outcomes identified in this theme:-

- Public Services Network (PSN) accreditation was achieved in June 2023 and subsequently in June 2024
- The Council achieved Payment Card Industry (PCI) compliance in September 2023 that needs renewal and moving to version 4 of the standard in September 2024
- The development of an SRS collaborative project on a single view of a child is being led by NCC
- Further supportive intelligence pack development was undertaken in support of the evidence-based decision making to support delivery of Asset Rationalisation Programme
- Development work has been progressed further in terms of the use of the Council's MI Hub (Management Information Hub) system to improve visibility and transparency of key reporting
- The Council undertook a Welsh Government funded Cyber Breach Workshop to understand the key steps in responding to a cyber security incident

Digital Infrastructure and Connectivity

This theme is especially aligned to the principles of innovation and collaborative. Below are details of progress made against various outcomes identified in this theme:-

- Two full fibre suppliers have made good progress with roll out in the city during the year
- Implementation of the Local Broadband Fund has increased the fibre footprint of the city and is now live
- Connectivity for the Local Broadband Fund (LBF) project is now in place and has brought major benefits in the 3 adult care homes
- 5G is now available in the city by some mobile operators.
- A new supplier has been awarded the contract for the Community Safety Network. This provides the network for the Council's CCTV service

Benefits Realisation

In the Digital Transformation theme there is a better understanding of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and automation capabilities. The redevelopment of the Council's website provides improved usability, design and accessibility standards. The Microsoft Teams Phone corporate rollout enhances existing telephony facilities. We have developed a greater understanding of how assistive technologies can support improved independence support. Cloud migrations improve resilience and availability of systems.

In the Digital Skills and Inclusion theme, access to free digital skills courses reduces barriers for citizens to improve their digital skills. We continue to provide digital inclusion by means of public Wi-Fi in public buildings and also by means of free bus Wi-Fi. Libraries and hubs continue to provide free access to devices at those locations. Strong partnership working in this theme has been developed and signposting of activities is an important benefit of this approach.

In the Data and Collaboration theme, the Council has numerous technical and organisational measures to protect data from cyber and other threats. Raised awareness of data protection and cyber security is key activity including for schools. The numerous preventative measures we have in place ensures good business continuity and cyber resilience. We continue to support the organisation in evidence-based decision making and the improved visibility and transparency of performance data.

In the Digital Infrastructure and Connectivity theme, improved broadband and mobile connectivity has been realised within the city. Connectivity for the Local Broadband Fund (LBF) project has brought major benefits in the 3 adult care homes. A new supplier has been awarded the contract for the Community Safety Network that provides improved performance and resilience. Cloud migrations also have resulted in improved availability and resilience.

Action Plan

The Digital Strategy identified numerous actions during its development, many that are detailed in this report. However, the changes in technology and the environment mean that actions need to be added and updated accordingly. Many of the actions are on-going activities, many on a cultural level.

Financial Summary

There is no specific cost associated with the report. The 'Organisation, Governance and Funding' section of the report identifies the funding of IT/digital costs highlighting additional investment and savings realised.

Risks

The Council, like other organisations, has an increased reliance on IT systems for effective and efficient service delivery and this has been highlighted further by the impact of the pandemic. It is crucial that the Council delivers in its delivery of IT service. Further details of risks are provided in the report and those identified below represent some high level risks.

Information risks are separately considered in the Annual Information Risk Report 23-24.

Risk	Impact of Risk if it occurs* (H/M/L)	Probability of risk occurring (H/M/L)	What is the Council doing or what has it done to avoid the risk or reduce its effect	Who is responsible for dealing with the risk?
Digital Strategy is not up to date/relevant to reflect the needs of services and customers	M	L	Digital Strategy 2022-27 is kept under constant review in terms of outcomes and actions. Progress will be reported to Digital Board that provides the governance to support the Review and update Digital Strategy with stakeholders.	Digital Services Manager (DSM) and Digital Projects Managers with internal and external stakeholders in partnership with SRS

Funding of service is not sufficient to meet the organisation's demands and aspirations, especially given more flexible working and the drive for service transformation	M	L	Innovation and development fund enables new technologies to be tested. Funding streams identified where there is not a suitable existing budget.	Digital Services Manager (DSM) and Digital Projects Managers in conjunction with Head of PPT / SRS management
Delivery of IT Service by Shared Resource Service (SRS) provides less control	M	M	Continue relationship with the SRS and contribute to its strategic direction and governance. Manage client side role to provide strategic input and performance monitoring. Contribute to the delivery of strategic, collaborative projects as well as NCC specific work	Digital Services Manager (DSM) and Digital Projects Managers in conjunction with Head of PPT/ SRS management
Critical IT systems are not available to services	H	L	Data centre migration completed previously. Nearly all key IT systems are in the cloud including the new finance system. This provides improved availability and resilience. Regular review of business continuity business impact assessments	Digital Services Manager and Digital Projects Managers in conjunction with SRS and services
Appropriate devices and operating systems are not available	M	L	Laptops remain the standard and Digital will consider future needs. On-going security updates for devices	Digital Services Manager (DSM) and Digital Projects Managers in conjunction with SRS

* Taking account of proposed mitigation measures

Links to Council Policies and Priorities

The new [Digital Strategy 2022-27](#) sets the overall direction for IT and digital solutions and links to the Council's new [Corporate Plan](#). The actions outlined in this report form part of the People, Policy and Transformation service plan for 24/25 and the strategic management is provided by the officer Digital Board. The strategy links to the [Council's People Plan 2023 - 2028](#).

Options Available and considered

1. Do nothing
2. Note the annual digital report and endorse its findings.

Preferred Option and Why

The preferred option is option 2 – note the Annual Digital Report 2023/24 and endorse its findings. This will provide an understanding of the current position in the delivery of the Council's Digital Strategy and give an opportunity to monitor progress on outcomes and actions identified.

Comments of Chief Financial Officer

There are no direct costs coming from this annual report as it reports on the Council's progress on its Digital Strategy only. Implementation of the plan / strategy is made from existing budgets.

Comments of Monitoring Officer

There are no specific legal issues arising from the Report. Any identified risks or issues arising from the delivery of the digital services will be picked up as part of the Information Risk management arrangements and the Council's corporate risk management framework.

Comments of Head of People, Policy and Transformation

This is the first annual report demonstrating the progress of the council's new digital plan. The effective use of digital technologies is a key aspect of our Corporate Plan, and it is vital in the technological environment we live and work. Providing free wi-fi and digital skills training supports our staff and residents to become more comfortable and competent in engaging with the council digitally.

The achievements highlighted in digital transformation and automation are important in supporting the council to become even more efficient and better able to meet the needs of Newport residents and businesses. Although in pilot stage, the use of machine translation will support the council to better communicate with communities across Newport and will support our legislative compliance. The launch of the first phase of the council's new website which is fully bilingual, meets design and accessibility standards, and improves the way in which residents engage with our services.

The report outlines how the Digital Strategy takes account of the sustainable development principle under the Well-being of Future Generations Act. Improving our digital infrastructure within the Council and the city will contribute towards the Well-being Goals for Wales, most notably a Prosperous Wales and a Globally Responsible Wales.

There are no negative Human Resources issues relating directly to the proposals and there are clear links to the council's new People Plan. The focus on digitally enabling our workforce will continue to support our workforce capacity and capabilities and organisational development principles.

Local issues

No specific local issues.

Scrutiny Committees

This report was presented to the Council's Scrutiny Management Committee on 26th July 2024. Scrutiny comments are as below and will be considered in this year's developments.

- The Committee requested that the difference between Robotic Process Automation (RPA) and Artificial Intelligence (AI) be clarified within the report
- The Committee were content with report.

Scrutiny comments are considered in the report and for future planning.

The SRS partnership also reports to Scrutiny annually, this takes place this quarter at Partnerships Scrutiny Committee.

Equalities Impact Assessment and the Equalities Act 2010

Equalities is considered in service delivery and was an important consideration in the development of the Council's Digital Strategy 2022-27 and its projects as demonstrated in the associated Fairness and Equality Impact Assessment.

Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

This report and its associated action plan incorporates the five ways of working as below:-

- Long term – digital initiatives need to consider the long term and follow a plan as demonstrated in the Digital Strategy. The strategic move to the cloud is one example of this long term vision as is the need to address digital contribution to climate change plans. Digital has an important role in its contribution to the Council's Climate Change Plan 2022-2027
- Prevention – preventative measures are key to ensure the effectiveness of the service by ensuring the infrastructure and systems are fit for purpose and appropriately supported and protected. The proactive migration of systems to the cloud is designed to prevent system availability problems. Much of the work in the Data and Collaboration theme is to prevent cyber attacks and other information risks, IT systems can provide data to inform better decision making and preventative measures. Initiatives on climate change are also designed to prevent impacts
- Integration – IT needs to be designed as part of business processes rather than an add-on at the end. The Digital team plays an important role integrating IT into business processes in conjunction with SRS and services
- Collaboration – IT delivery relies on the collaboration between the Council's IT service delivery partner, the Shared Resource Service (SRS) the Digital team and all Council services as well as with suppliers
- Involvement – the Council has contact with internal services, members of the public and businesses in relation to IT delivery. The development of the Digital Strategy 2022-27 included wide engagement with internal and external stakeholders. More generally, the Council has IT systems to engage with the public including via its web site and bus Wi-Fi

Consultation

Comments from members of the Council's Digital Board have been included within the text of the report in line with their role as key strategic stakeholders.

Background Papers

[Digital Strategy 2022-27](#)

Annual Information Risk Report 2023/24

People Plan 2023-2028

Dated: 16th August 2024

Annual Digital Report 2023/24

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Executive Summary

This report is focused on progress made in the delivery of the [Council's Digital Strategy](#)

The strategy is guided by seven key principles:-

- Innovation
- Data driven
- User centred
- Inclusive
- Collaborative
- Secure
- Green

This report is structured around the strategy's four themes:-

1. Digital Transformation
2. Digital Skills and Inclusion
3. Data and Collaboration
4. Digital Infrastructure and Connectivity

Digital Strategy Progress Update

Good progress has been made in the delivery of the outcomes of the Digital Strategy. The Digital Transformation and Data and Collaboration themes are the most developed, reflecting the outcomes for which the Council has the greatest amount of control and influence. The Digital Skills and Inclusion and Digital Infrastructure and Connectivity themes are more dependent on other stakeholders and require a joined-up approach.

Digital Transformation

This theme is especially aligned to the principles of innovation, user centred and green. Below are details of progress made against various outcomes identified in this theme:-

- The Council with other SRS partners has been testing out the opportunities for Artificial Intelligence (AI) using Microsoft CoPilot and a future business case is being developed
- Further opportunities for the use of Robotic Process Automation (RPA) have been developed and implemented, building on previous progress notably:
 - Automation and processing of government emergency 'Cost of Living Payments' to provide residents with essential financial support
 - The automation of onboarding - starters, leavers and movers
 - The automation of existing Temporary Accommodation housing benefits payments to alleviate significant and unprecedented homelessness pressures currently faced by Housing
 - The automation of the housing register applications process, including the addressing the current backlog and newly submitted applications
- During the year a project to test an automated document translation solution for 75 different languages was undertaken and roll out is planned
- A project to roll out Microsoft Teams Phone is part way through its implementation and is due to completed in the first half of 24/25
- A "Smart Hub" facility in Newport Market was set up to promote and demonstrate how technology can help support more independent living. The plan is to move this to the Central Library site
- The first phase of the redevelopment of the Council's website www.newport.gov.uk went live in February 2024 including the home page and priority areas. This is now fully bilingual, meets design and accessibility standards and is a major improvement over the old website
- A customer contact review took place during the year and this will provide recommendations on improving customer contact with the Council

- The Council's migration to a cloud-based solution for its financial system went live on 2/4/24. With the IDOX Uniform migration nearly all the Council's highest priority IT systems are in the cloud

Digital Skills and Inclusion

This theme is especially aligned to the principles of inclusive and collaborative. Below are details of progress made against various outcomes identified in this theme:-

- The Adult and Community learning service continues to deliver digital skills courses as part of its offering
- The implementation of a tablet loan scheme working in conjunction with the library service will be considered for implementation in 2024
- Libraries and Hubs continue to provide free access to devices for citizens
- The Council continues to provide free public Wi-Fi at about 50 sites across the city many of which have been migrated to an SRS provided solution to remove duplication and realise savings
- The Council also contributes to Newport Transport's free bus Wi-Fi service
- The Council continues its membership of key groups such as the Digital Inclusion Alliance Wales and the Right Skills Board highlighting the need to work collaboratively
- A draft document that maps key touch points for digital skills and inclusion activities has been developed. Digital continues to engage with various partners and stakeholders for signposting
- Initial work took place on the development of workforce assessment tools to capture the current level of skills to inform the skill development requirements

Data and Collaboration

This theme is especially aligned to the principles of collaborative, secure and data driven. Below are details of progress made against various outcomes identified in this theme:-

- Public Services Network (PSN) accreditation was achieved in June 2023 and subsequently in June 2024
- The Council achieved Payment Card Industry (PCI) compliance in September 2023 that needs renewal and moving to version 4 of the standard in September 2024
- The development of an SRS collaborative project on a single view of a child is being led by NCC
- Further supportive intelligence pack development was undertaken in support of the evidence-based decision making to support delivery of Asset Rationalisation Programme
- Development work has been progressed further in terms of the use of the Council's MI Hub (Management Information Hub) system to improve visibility and transparency of key reporting
- The Council has numerous technical and organisational measures to protect data from cyber and other threats. A key role is of awareness raising for employees and members with the most training ever provided. Specific training was carried out for members with 80% attendance achieved
- Various policies were updated to provide guidance to staff together with the MetaCompliance solution to improve user awareness through training
- The Information Management team provides a Service Level Agreement (SLA) for primary schools and 3 secondary schools. This includes training for which this year had the highest attendance to date
- The Council undertook a Welsh Government funded Cyber Breach Workshop to understand the key steps in responding to a cyber security incident
- The Council dealt with an increasing number of Freedom of Information requests. For 23/24, the Council missed its target for responses to Freedom of Information requests this year with 85.9% responded to within 20 working days against a target of 88%
- Despite a record number of 134 requests this year, the performance for Subject Access Requests was 79.1% of requests completed within a calendar month against a target of 75% and is the best performance to date

Digital Infrastructure and Connectivity

This theme is especially aligned to the principles of innovation and collaborative. Below are details of progress made against various outcomes identified in this theme:-

- Two full fibre suppliers have made good progress with roll out in the city during the year
- Implementation of the Local Broadband Fund has increased the fibre footprint of the city and is now live
- Connectivity for the Local Broadband Fund (LBF) project is now in place and has brought major benefits in the 3 adult care homes. The full fibre installation and in-building Wi-Fi is complete with implementation of the care management system by January 2025
- 5G is now available in the city by some mobile operators.
- A capital refresh programme, mainly for wireless infrastructure replacement, was agreed by the Council and SRS for implementation in 24/25
- A new supplier has been awarded the contract for the Community Safety Network. This provides the network for the Council's CCTV service

Benefits Realisation

In the Digital Transformation theme there is a better understanding of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and automation capabilities. The redevelopment of the Council's website provides improved usability, design and accessibility standards. The Microsoft Teams Phone corporate rollout enhances existing telephony facilities. We have developed a greater understanding of how assistive technologies can support improved independence support. Cloud migrations improve resilience and availability of systems.

In the Digital Skills and Inclusion theme, access to free digital skills courses reduces barriers for citizens to improve their digital skills. We continue to provide digital inclusion by means of public Wi-Fi in public buildings and also by means of free bus Wi-Fi. Libraries and hubs continue to provide free access to devices at those locations. Strong partnership working in this theme has been developed and signposting of activities is an important benefit of this approach.

In the Data and Collaboration theme, the Council has numerous technical and organisational measures to protect data from cyber and other threats. Raised awareness of data protection and cyber security is key activity including for schools. The numerous preventative measures we have in place ensures good business continuity and cyber resilience. We continue to support the organisation in evidence-based decision making and the improved visibility and transparency of performance data.

In the Digital Infrastructure and Connectivity theme, improved broadband and mobile connectivity has been realised within the city. Connectivity for the Local Broadband Fund (LBF) project has brought major benefits in the 3 adult care homes. A new supplier has been awarded the contract for the Community Safety Network that provides improved performance and resilience. Cloud migrations also have resulted in improved availability and resilience.

Action Plan

The Digital Strategy identified numerous actions during its development, many that are detailed in this report. However, the changes in technology and the environment mean that actions need to be added and updated accordingly. Many of the actions are on-going activities, both technical and service or cultural change. There is an increased focus on the opportunities that automation and Artificial Intelligence can offer the organisation given their rapid development recently. The importance of the web site continues to be recognised for further development.

There is more joining up and coordinated efforts required in the Digital Skills and Inclusion theme. The Council will continue to protect data against cyber attacks and other threats as well as to use data for better decision making. The Council will continue to be supportive of developments in the digital infrastructure of the city including broadband and mobile coverage. It will complete the roll out of its new CCTV infrastructure. It will continue with its governance to support the roll out of the strategy including recommendations received from Audit Wales.

1. Background and Purpose

1.1. Background

Digital technology plays a critically important role in effective and efficient service delivery for organisations and Newport City Council relies heavily on this for effective day to day operation. The development of the [Council's Digital Strategy 2022-2027](#) sets the strategic vision for the use of digital technology across the organisation.

The strategy is guided by seven key principles:-

- Innovation - embrace new ways of working and technology
- Data driven - decisions are made based on sound evidence
- User centred - users are at the centre of what we do
- Inclusive - services are available to meet individual needs
- Collaborative - collaboration internally and externally
- Secure - systems and data are protected
- Green - digital technology supports the Council's net zero aspirations

The strategy is based on four key themes:-

1. Digital Transformation
2. Digital Skills and Inclusion
3. Data and Collaboration
4. Digital Infrastructure and Connectivity



1.1. Organisation, Governance and Funding

This report recognises the importance of appropriate organisation and governance to support the delivery of the Digital Strategy. This includes the key roles of the Shared Resource Service (SRS), Digital Services and Service Areas of the Council. The roles of these are detailed in **Appendix 1**.

Spend on IT/digital is incurred in various areas. Most of the funding is provided to the Shared Resource Service (SRS) that employs IT staff and pays for a number of contracts on behalf of the Council.

The Council has a number of budgets that remain with the Council including for major systems “retained contracts”, capital programme and equipment spend. The Council continues to look to rationalise systems wherever possible. Schools fund their own IT provision from their own budgets. This has been supplemented by Welsh Government “EdTech” funding. Working with SRS, the Council has realised major savings and this work continues.

Stakeholders

There are numerous stakeholders involved with the delivery of the Digital Strategy and these are outlined in **Appendix 2**.

Audit Wales Review of Digital Strategies in Wales

Audit Wales carried out a review of digital strategies across Wales. It made four recommendations in relation to Newport City Council in its [report](#). These are:-

- Involvement - To help ensure that its strategic approach to digital meets the needs of its communities the Council should strengthen arrangements to engage and involve the full diversity of the population with its digital strategy
- Collaboration - To strengthen its arrangements to secure effectiveness, efficiency and economy through partnership working in delivering its digital strategy, the Council should
 - map out which organisations it needs to work with
 - Identify and assess opportunities to collaborate; and
 - develop current arrangements to monitor the effectiveness and value for money of any partnerships it enters into
- Resourcing - To help ensure its strategic approach to digital is aligned to available resources and to help enable the Council to take a long-term view of its costs and benefits the Council should identify the resources required to deliver its digital strategy
- Monitoring and reviewing effectiveness - To better understand the impact of its digital strategy, monitor value for money, and assess if identified benefits have been realised, the Council should set and monitor measurable outcomes that will help the Council understand the progress, effectiveness and the impact of its digital strategy

The Council responded to these recommendations and this is summarised in the Conclusions section of this report. Audit Wales has cited Newport as best practice for engagement with communities in the development of its digital strategy.

1.3. Purpose of the Report and Benefits

The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the Digital Strategy in terms of progress made against the desired outcomes and actions. Whilst the principles and themes of the strategy remain, the outcomes and actions will be dynamic, driven by opportunities and changes in digital technology. As an example, Artificial Intelligence (AI) and automation technologies provide opportunities that need to be embraced.

This is the fifth Annual Digital Report but the first full year since the Digital Strategy’s was formally adopted by the organisation. As such, this report is focused on the delivery of the strategy and its associated outcomes. It is primarily focused at a strategic level and the difference this is making to service delivery. It complements the Annual Information Risk Report which is more detailed with a slightly different purpose.

The benefits of the report are as follows:

- To report progress on the Digital Strategy by theme
- To highlight outcomes achieved and those that need more work
- To identify opportunities, address weaknesses and update desired outcomes and actions
- To document stakeholders and address their needs
- To record the benefits realised as part of the delivery of the Digital Strategy

2. Digital Strategy Progress Update

This part of the report identifies the Council's current progress in the delivery of the Digital Strategy. This is structured by the four themes of the strategy and their associated outcomes with details of progress made. The outcomes are not all planned for delivery at the same time so there will be some with little or no progress updates at this point.

2.1. Digital Transformation

This theme of the strategy states *'we will transform services by the innovative use of digital technology that is effective, easy to use and designed around user needs.'* It includes various desired outcomes identified during the development of the strategy.

Services transformed by the innovative use of digital technology

The Council along with SRS partners is testing the use of Microsoft CoPilot for 365 with 65 licences allocated across the Council, part of 300 licences across SRS partners. Microsoft Copilot is an Artificial intelligence (AI) assistant that enhances productivity and creativity. Copilot works alongside Microsoft 365 apps such as Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Outlook and Teams providing real-time intelligent assistance using a Large Language Model. These licences have been deployed and sessions held with the test group to demonstrate some of the facilities and share learning. This project will start another stage in Q2 of 24/25 to look at more specific use across SRS partners working with a Microsoft Gold Partner.

Robotic Process Automation (RPA) is the use of technology to automate repetitive, rule-based business process and administrative activities which are undertaken by staff resource. RPA effectively mimics the logical, structured actions of staff resource. Further opportunities for the use of (RPA) have been developed most notably including significant work in Housing and Communities expected to be delivered in Q2 of 24/25 on housing benefit payments for people in temporary accommodation and for housing register processes. RPA is designed to automate repetitive tasks to free up time for higher value tasks for staff. Other opportunities are at varying stages of progress and one of these is incorporated into the Automation collaborative project working with SRS partners.

A "Smart Hub" facility in Newport Market was set up an enabled bookings during the year. The facility is to promote and demonstrate how technology can help support more independent living. Further promotion took place during the year and plans are being developed for the longer term given its potential to improve independence and reduce costs. The plans are for the facility to be accessible in the Central Library and Museum facility.

During the year a project to test an automated document translation solution for 75 different languages was undertaken. Feedback has been positive to date, specifically including translation from English into Welsh. The cost of machine translation is a very small proportion of human translation. The aim is to formalise the use of this solution including what its limitations are and when it should be used.

Following agreement to replace the Council's existing corporate telephony solution, a project to roll out Microsoft Teams Phone is part way through its implementation and is due to completed in the first half of 24/25. This enhances the existing facilities by providing a new facility to make or receive calls on any device where Microsoft Teams is installed. This includes Council laptops as well as Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) for secure access to e-mail and Microsoft Teams on personal devices.

The improved connectivity for the Local Broadband Fund project for three adult NCC care homes is now in place and implementation to date has been positive. Training and implementation of the care management system will be completed in Q1 of 24/25 with positive feedback to date. The terms required for grant funding were met and approved by Welsh Government resulting in its contribution being claimed by NCC.

Digital solutions that are innovative, effective and easy to use

The redevelopment of the website www.newport.gov.uk was highlighted as really important for customers and a key action in the Digital Strategy. Solutions were reviewed by the Council and SRS and the [Local Government Drupal](#) solution was identified as the most appropriate for our needs. It is an open source platform, designed specifically for public sector, fully mobile responsive, designed for mobile first and with improved accessibility. This solution is currently used by 47 Councils with the opportunity to share development across the community. The design, layout and content was based on user experience, research and best practice. The first phase of the redevelopment went live in February 2024. This includes the home page and priority areas used by customers. It includes enhanced search functionality with a review of content to ensure it is concise with a lower reading age. This is the first implementation of a bilingual (English/Welsh) web site using this platform and the first use of this solution in Wales. There has been positive feedback to date on the new website. Further work is in progress to redevelop the rest of the website.

Digital solutions that are available 24x7 from anywhere

As detailed above, the first phase of the Council's web site is now live and this is designed to be the primary solution for the Council's customers. The Council's migration to a cloud-based solution for its financial system went live on 2/4/24. This is a major milestone for the Council given the significance and impact of this new system. The project to migrate IDOX Uniform to the cloud was completed in November 2023. These migrations mean that nearly all of the Council's highest priority IT systems are in the cloud. This is a positive development for resilience and sustainability. No other cloud migrations are currently planned but opportunities will be considered where practical.

Digital solutions that meet design, accessibility, Welsh Language and other standards

The new Council website is now fully bilingual and meets design and accessibility standards, Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG 2.1 AA), which is a major improvement over the old website. The remainder of the website will be migrated to meet these standards. Other systems will be reviewed over time to improve standards.

A positive contribution to climate change and environmental targets

The migration of the most major IT systems to the cloud together with the migration to shared infrastructure by the SRS reduces energy consumption and associated costs due to improved cooling efficiency in these facilities. Work is required to make further digital improvements to climate change, primarily working with the SRS. This will include new local network infrastructure to be implemented in Q1/Q2 of 24/25 that should provide greater opportunities for reduced energy usage.

The council's web site is the preferred channel for customers, together with council app

A customer contact review took place during the year and this will provide recommendations on improving customer contact with the Council. There are likely to be common themes that will inform some organisational and digital developments to be incorporated into this strategy's action plan. We continue to see a high volume of self-service using the e-forms that are available on the website.

Access channels that are joined up effectively, providing choice and consistency of service

The customer contact review is likely to extend the planned roll-out of the Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system across the authority to increase the presence on the website for some areas.

For employees and members: Digital solutions that are effective and easy to use

As detailed above, a project to roll out Microsoft Teams Phone is part way through its implementation. Further opportunities for the use of Robotic Process Automation (RPA) have been developed. The Council has worked on the migration of two major systems to the cloud.

For employees and members: Digital solutions that enable remote working

The Council continues to use Microsoft Teams with interactive screens in meeting rooms to enable hybrid meetings. This includes Council and officer meetings that enables remote participation for improved accessibility and reduced travel. There are enhanced facilities in the Council Chamber and during the year improvements were made to the speakers and microphones in Committee Room 1. This room is regularly used for most scrutiny and significant meetings. All laptops have the facility for employees and members to work securely wherever they have an internet connection. As detailed earlier, employees and members also have the ability to use Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) for secure access to Microsoft Outlook and Teams on personal devices. Council issued mobile phones have internet access and are managed securely. A number of services use the Electronic Document Management System (EDMS) and paper documents are scanned and made available to services. A printing solution for partners to be able to print when working in Council buildings has been implemented.

For employees and members: Processes for employees are automated to reduce data entry

As detailed above, further opportunities for the use of Robotic Process Automation (RPA) have been developed within the Council. One of five SRS Strategic projects is around automation. Within this project there has a number of initiatives on RPA with input from all partners. A notable part of this is the starters, leavers and movers process for staff. The aim is to learn lessons across partners and to implement these in one or more partners as appropriate.

2.2. Digital Skills and Inclusion

This theme of the strategy states '*We will develop the digital skills of our citizens, employees and members plus support improved access to digital technology.*' It includes various desired outcomes identified during the development of the strategy.

Improved digital skills for citizens and businesses

The Adult and Community learning service continues to deliver digital skills courses as part of its offering. Take-up varies across the course offer with the mid-level digital skills courses proving more popular, whilst the International Computer Driving Licence (ICDL) courses have not attracted the attendance seen in previous years. There has been discussion at the officer Digital Board (see **Appendix 1**) to identify the range of digital support that NCC teams and other organisations could provide offer to residents in the city. Smaller staff teams in key areas and reductions in grant funding has led to less resource being available to implement digital skills training across the city.

Improved digital inclusion by providing access to devices

The implementation of a tablet loan scheme working in conjunction with the library service will be considered for implementation in 2024. Serco, the DWP Restart prime contractor for Wales is providing 12 laptops per quarter for each subcontractor. Libraries and Hubs continue to provide free access to devices for citizens. It is important to work collaboratively across the organisation as well as with our partners who are also providing digital inclusion activities across the city.

Improved digital inclusion by providing free public Wi-Fi and signposting free data available

The Council continues to provide free public Wi-Fi at about 50 sites across the city. During the year the Digital team has worked with the SRS and services on the migration to an SRS provided solution to remove duplication and realise savings. This ensures the commitment to digital inclusion whilst realising substantial cost savings. The Council also contributes to Newport Transport's free bus Wi-Fi service. The signposting of free data SIMS continues to be shared with citizens via Prevention and Inclusion service area, including community connectors and the cost of living team.

Improved digital inclusion driven by customer insight profiling

Plans for this will be considered following a presentation to the Digital Board on the customer insight information we have available. Digital inclusion activities will also be informed by the results of the customer contact review with data on customer contact and interaction.

Services that are joined up across partners

The Council continues its membership of the Digital Inclusion Alliance Wales that has representatives from all sectors and many organisations across Wales whose focus is on improving digital inclusion. A draft document that maps key touch points for digital skills and inclusion activities has been developed. Digital continues to engage with various partners and stakeholders to ensure appropriate signposting of relevant activities. The Council attend the Right Skills Board and met with the University of South Wales to share information on activities and discussed opportunities for collaboration on digital inclusion.

For employees and members: Improved digital skills for employees and members

Initial work took place on the development of workforce assessment tools to capture the current level of skills to inform the skill development requirements. The assessment of Artificial Intelligence (AI) solutions could provide enhanced capabilities to support staff with their digital needs. The aim is to enhance the role of the Council's Digital Champions.

Improved access to devices and systems for employees currently without a device

This has not been progressed specifically to date. However, this remains a consideration for improved engagement with employees currently without a device.

Employees and members have access to equipment to work in an agile manner

As detailed elsewhere, laptops are issued to employees and members to enable agile working. This is complemented by a remote access solution that provides secure and simple access wherever an internet connection is available.

2.3. Data and Collaboration

This theme of the strategy states '*We will improve service delivery by better use of data and increased collaboration built on secure systems and processes.*' It includes various desired outcomes identified during the development of the strategy.

People have confidence in the council's management of their data

Public Services Network (PSN) accreditation was achieved in June 2023 and subsequently the Council achieved compliance from June 2024 until June 2025. In addition, the Council achieved Payment Card Industry (PCI) compliance in September 2023 that needs renewal and moving to version 4 of the standard in September 2024. This demonstrates a continued commitment to protecting the Council's data. Information risk management activities are managed by the Information Governance Group at a strategic level and operationally by the Information Management team.

Data is shared appropriately to support partnership and collaborative working

The Council continues the ongoing development of Information Sharing Protocols and Data Disclosure agreements to ensure appropriate data sharing and collaboration. The development of an SRS partner collaborative project on a single view of a child is being led by NCC.

Decision making, service delivery and planning is facilitated by better use of data

Further supportive intelligence pack development was undertaken in support of the evidence-based decision making to support delivery of Asset Rationalisation Programme - including focus on Community, Library, Commercial and Industrial and Youth Justice assets in the last period. Further scoping and requirements gathering being undertaken for development of next phase. Development work has been progressed further in terms of the use of the Council's MI Hub (Management Information Hub) system to further improve visibility and transparency across a number of key reporting and monitoring areas. This includes further enhancements to the Executive Board strategic overviews in support of the Challenge Review process, further development of the HR related dashboards and scoping for monitoring and reporting of complaints and compliments among others.

Completion of Newport Pupil Forecast estimate figures for 2024-2030 to support Education with future planning of school places. Further development work was undertaken to facilitate intelligence-based decision making through the creation of school profiles on exclusions and attendance to inform and support Education in monitoring meetings with comprehensive schools.

Data protected against cyber attacks and other threats

The Council has numerous technical and organisational measures to protect data from cyber and other threats. This recently includes a Security Information and Event Management (SIEM) system and Security Operations Centre (SOC) to undertake more proactive monitoring. As detailed above, information risk management is carried out by the Information Governance Group and Information Management team. A key role is of awareness raising for employees and members. This includes regular training and e-learning for staff with the most training ever provided. In addition, during the year specific training was carried out for members with 80% attendance achieved. Various policies were updated to provide guidance to staff. The Council continues to use a solution called MetaCompliance to support and improve user awareness through training and phishing simulations. The Council undertook a Welsh Government funded Cyber Breach Workshop to understand the key steps in responding to a cyber security incident.

Schools are supported in sound information management, cyber resilience and information security

The Information Management team provides a Service Level Agreement (SLA) for primary schools and 3 secondary schools. This includes training for which this year had the highest attendance to date. The Council supports schools in the development of cyber resilience plans for schools. As corporately, a Security Information and Event Management (SIEM) system and Security Operations Centre (SOC) provides more proactive monitoring.

Improved business continuity by digital solutions that are resilient with high availability

As detailed elsewhere, the Council's migration to a cloud-based solution for its financial system went live on 2/4/24. The project to migrate IDOX Uniform to the cloud was completed in November 2023. These migrations mean that nearly all of the Council's highest priority IT systems are in the cloud. This is a positive development for resilience and sustainability. No other cloud migrations are currently planned but opportunities will be considered where practical.

Data from digital solutions such as sensor technology makes a positive contribution

The Council continues to identify opportunities for Internet of Things (IoT) technologies including sensors. Limited development has taken place due to lack of opportunities identified to date.

Up to date and meaningful information is available to citizens, businesses etc.

The website redevelopment project progressed well with phase one launched in February 2024. The key aims of this project are to:

- Focus the content of the website, removing unnecessary and out of date information, making it easier to understand and find information
- Ensure all content is accessible and to lower the reading age of content
- Deliver the website on a platform that supports accessibility
- Provide a site that is fully mobile responsive and can be used on all devices
- Ensure seamless links between systems and platforms to enhance customer experience

The design of the new site has been driven by user experience. The project will also result in a suite of policies, procedures and best practice that will support the ongoing maintenance and development of the site.

The customer contact review is being carried out to identify strengths and weakness and will inform future developments of what information is made available to customers and how.

Improved transparency with council data made available that facilitates the use of data

Work on-going to improve user accessibility, monitoring and reporting via the Council's Management Information (MI) Hub performance management system. Additional development work undertaken to enhance the external website mapping information portal for Newport residents and visitors. Collaborative discussions are continuing with SRS and local authority regional partners in relation to prospective regional delivery service models, with a number of options now being progressed formally. As detailed above, further supportive intelligence pack development was to support delivery of Asset Rationalisation Programme. Completion of Newport pupil forecast estimate figures for 2024-2030 to support Education with future planning of school places. Further development work was undertaken to facilitate intelligence-based decision making through the creation of school profiles on exclusions and attendance to inform and support Education in monitoring meetings with comprehensive schools.

Demonstrate organisational commitment to processing customer requests for information

The Council dealt with an increasing number of requests and some internal processes were changed during the year. For 23/24, the Council missed its target for responses to Freedom of Information requests this year with 85.9% responded to within 20 working days against a target of 88%.

The performance for Subject Access Requests was 79.1% of requests completed within a calendar month against a target of 75%. This represents the best performance since this has been measured at a time when we received a record number of requests this year, 134 were received in total.

Improved understanding of the city, its citizens & businesses as a result of insight profiling

Building upon previous insight profiling work in terms of understanding customer behaviours and preferences for online and digital access channels, a presentation will be delivered to Digital Board in Q2 of 24/25. This will help to identify those areas where probability and likelihood is most likely and where the harder to reach areas of the community will require specific engagement and targeted activities. Next steps and actions will be determined following this.

1.1. Digital Infrastructure and Connectivity

This theme of the strategy states '*We will drive excellent digital infrastructure and connectivity for the city and for the council.*' It includes various desired outcomes identified during the development of the strategy.

Excellent connectivity in the city due to increased investment in city's digital infrastructure

Two full fibre suppliers have made good progress with roll out in the city during the year. One provider is mainly in the East of the city to date and another primarily in the Langstone area. This is in addition to largest providers BT and Virgin Media who already have a large presence in the city. Implementation of the Local Broadband Fund has increased the fibre footprint of the city and is now live. 5G is now available in the city by some mobile operators. The Council is supportive of such developments.

Newport established as Wales' first data city

Work continues at regional level with Cardiff Capital Region Corporate Joint Committee (CJC) to develop proposals to establish the Newport position. There are emerging strategic links through regional Investment Zone and regional digital skills workstreams.

Council services are delivered by fast and reliable networks

A capital refresh programme, mainly for wireless infrastructure replacement, was agreed by the Council and SRS for implementation in 24/25. Following a procurement process to ensure best value, a new supplier has been awarded the contract for the Community Safety Network. This provides the network for the Council's CCTV service. The Council used existing hardware over the short term and will be replaced in the first half of 24/25. It is expected that the new hardware and improved set up will bring about various benefits to the network and the service.

Smart place technology improves service delivery

The Digital team continues to engage with services to promote the use of Smart place technology. Limited development has taken place due to lack of opportunities identified to date. Engagement took place with Civil Contingencies to consider its potential use.

Digital infrastructure for the city considered in council buildings, planning, road infrastructure and assets

As detailed elsewhere, connectivity for the Local Broadband Fund (LBF) project is now in place and has brought major benefits in the 3 adult care homes. The full fibre installation and in-building Wi-Fi is complete with implementation of the care management system during the first half of 24/25. Welsh Government recently consulted on changes to building regulations to require gigabit capable connections in all new homes across Wales.

For employees and members: Building infrastructure that supports a flexible and agile workforce

As detailed elsewhere, a capital refresh programme mainly for wireless infrastructure replacement was agreed by the Council and SRS for implementation in 24/25.

For employees and members: Employees and members have access to systems irrespective of where they choose to work

As detailed elsewhere, the Council issues laptops with secure remote access. In addition, one major system was migrated to the cloud and the new cloud finance system went live on 2/4/24.

3. Conclusions

Good progress has been made in the delivery of the outcomes of the Digital Strategy. The Digital Transformation and Data and Collaboration themes are the most developed, reflecting the outcomes for which the Council has the greatest amount of control and influence. The Digital Skills and Inclusion and Digital Infrastructure and Connectivity themes are more dependent on other stakeholders and require a joined-up approach. Therefore, these themes are a little less developed and are more complex to deliver the desired outcomes. The Council is engaged with numerous stakeholders as detailed in the stakeholder mapping in **Appendix 2**. The governance and funding arrangements are included in **Appendix 1** and a specific response to the Audit Wales report on the Digital Strategy is summarised below.

1.1. Digital Transformation

Good progress has been made against various objectives identified in the digital strategy. The Council with other SRS partners has been testing out the opportunities for Artificial Intelligence (AI) using Microsoft CoPilot and a future business case is being developed. Further opportunities for the use of Robotic Process Automation (RPA) have been developed most notably including significant work in Housing and Communities expected to be delivered in Q2 of 24/25. RPA is designed to automate repetitive tasks to free up time for higher value tasks for staff. Other opportunities are at varying stages of progress. During the year a project to test an automated document translation solution for 75 different languages was undertaken. A project to roll out Microsoft Teams Phone is part way through its implementation and is due to be completed in the first half of 24/25.

A "Smart Hub" facility in Newport Market was set up and enabled bookings during the year. The facility is to promote and demonstrate how technology can help support more independent living. The plans are for the facility to be accessible in the Central Library and Museum facility.

The redevelopment of the website www.newport.gov.uk was highlighted as really important for customers and a key action in the Digital Strategy. The design, layout and content was based on user experience, research and best practice. The first phase of the redevelopment went live in February 2024 using the Local Government Drupal solution. This includes the home page and priority areas used by customers. It includes enhanced search functionality with a review of content to ensure it is concise with a lower reading age. This is the first implementation of a bilingual (English/Welsh) web site using this platform and the first use of this solution in Wales. There has been positive feedback to date on the new website. Further work is in progress to redevelop the rest of the website.

A customer contact review took place during the year and this will provide recommendations on improving customer contact with the Council. There are likely to be common themes that will inform some organisational and digital developments.

The Council's migration to a cloud-based solution for its financial system went live on 2/4/24. This is a major milestone for the Council given the significance and impact of this new system. The project to migrate IDOX Uniform to the cloud was completed in November 2023. These migrations mean that nearly all of the Council's highest priority IT systems are in the cloud.

The migration of IT systems to the cloud together with the migration to shared infrastructure by the SRS reduces energy consumption and associated costs due to improved cooling efficiency in these facilities. Work is required to make further digital improvements to climate change, primarily working with the SRS.

The Council continues to use Microsoft Teams with interactive screens in a number of meeting rooms to enable hybrid meetings. This includes Council and officer meetings that enables remote participation for improved accessibility and reduced travel. All laptops have the facility for employees and members to work securely wherever they have an internet connection. As detailed earlier, employees and members also have the ability to use Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) for secure access to Microsoft Outlook and Teams on personal devices.

1.2. Digital Skills and Inclusion

The Adult and Community learning service continues to deliver digital skills courses as part of its offering. Take-up varies across the course offer with the mid-level digital skills courses proving more popular, whilst the International Computer Driving Licence (ICDL) courses have not attracted the attendance seen in previous years.

The implementation of a tablet loan scheme working in conjunction with the library service will be considered for implementation in 2024. Libraries and Hubs continue to provide free access to devices for citizens. It is important to work collaboratively across the organisation as well as with our partners who are also providing digital inclusion activities across the city.

The Council continues to provide free public Wi-Fi at about 50 sites across the city. During the year the migration took place to an SRS provided solution to remove duplication and realise savings whilst maintaining the commitment to digital inclusion. The Council also contributes to Newport Transport's free bus Wi-Fi service. The signposting of free data SIMS continues to be shared with citizens via Prevention and Inclusion service area, including community connectors and the cost of living team.

The Council continues its membership of the Digital Inclusion Alliance Wales that has representatives from all sectors and many organisations across Wales whose focus is on improving digital inclusion. The Council attend the Right Skills Board. A draft document that maps key touch points for digital skills and inclusion activities has been developed. Digital continues to engage with various partners and stakeholders to ensure appropriate signposting of relevant activities.

Initial work took place on the development of workforce assessment tools to capture the current level of skills to inform the skill development requirements. As detailed elsewhere, laptops are issued to employees and members to enable agile working. This is complemented by a remote access solution that provides secure and simple access wherever an internet connection is available.

1.3. Data and Collaboration

Public Services Network (PSN) accreditation was achieved in June 2023 and subsequently the Council achieved compliance from June 2024 until June 2025. In addition, the Council achieved Payment Card Industry (PCI) compliance in September 2023 that needs renewal and moving to version 4 of the standard in September 2024. This demonstrates a continued commitment to protecting the Council's data.

The Council continues the ongoing development of Information Sharing Protocols and Data Disclosure agreements to ensure appropriate data sharing and collaboration. The development of an SRS partner collaborative project on a single view of a child is being led by NCC.

Further supportive intelligence pack development was undertaken in support of the evidence-based decision making to support delivery of Asset Rationalisation Programme. Development work has been progressed further in terms of the use of the Council's MI Hub (Management Information Hub) system to improve visibility and transparency across a number of key reporting and monitoring areas. Completion of Newport Pupil Forecast estimate figures for 2024-2030 to support Education with future planning of school places.

The Council has numerous technical and organisational measures to protect data from cyber and other threats. A key role is of awareness raising for employees and members with the most training ever provided. Specific training was carried out for members with 80% attendance achieved. Various policies were updated to provide guidance to staff together with the MetaCompliance solution to improve user awareness through training. The Information Management team provides a Service Level Agreement (SLA) for primary schools and 3 secondary schools. This includes training for which this year had the highest attendance to date. The Council undertook a Welsh Government funded Cyber Breach Workshop to understand the key steps in responding to a cyber security incident.

The website redevelopment project progressed well with phase one launched in February 2024. The key aims of this project are to remove unnecessary and out of date information and make it easier to understand and find information. It also aims to ensure all content is accessible, fully mobile responsive and can be used on all devices. The customer contact review is being carried out to identify strengths and weakness and will inform future developments of what information is made available to customers and how.

The Council dealt with an increasing number of Freedom of Information requests and some internal processes were changed during the year. For 23/24, the Council missed its target for responses to requests this year with 85.9% responded to within 20 working days against a target of 88%.

The performance for Subject Access Requests was 79.1% of requests completed within a calendar month against a target of 75%. This represents the best performance since this has been measured at a time when we received a record number of requests this year, 134 were received in total.

1.4. Digital Infrastructure and Connectivity

Two full fibre suppliers have made good progress with roll out in the city during the year. Implementation of the Local Broadband Fund has increased the fibre footprint of the city and is now live. Connectivity for the Local Broadband Fund (LBF) project is now in place and has brought major benefits in the 3 adult care homes. The full fibre installation and in-building Wi-Fi is complete with implementation of the care management system by January 25. 5G is now available in the city by some mobile operators.

A capital refresh programme, mainly for wireless infrastructure replacement, was agreed by the Council and SRS for implementation in 24/25. Following a procurement process to ensure best value, a new supplier has been awarded the contract for the Community Safety Network. This provides an improved network for the Council's CCTV service.

As detailed elsewhere, the Council issues laptops with secure remote access. In addition, one major system was migrated to the cloud and the new cloud finance system went live on 2/4/24. The Digital team continues to engage with services to promote the use of Smart place technology.

3.5. Organisation, Governance and Funding

The primary purpose of this report is to provide an update on the delivery of the Digital Strategy. It also details in **Appendix 1**, there are various arrangements in place to support its delivery, especially the key role of the Shared Resource Service and its associated governance. This includes the production of an annual report presented to Partnership Scrutiny Committee. There are numerous stakeholders involved with the delivery of the Digital Strategy and these are outlined in **Appendix 2**. There are various existing funding streams available to support the delivery of the strategy as well as processes to establish funding for specific projects or initiatives.

The Council formally responded to the Audit Wales Review of Digital Strategies in Wales. Newport City Council's view is that two of Audit Wales' recommendations are complete, given the processes it already has in place. These include recommendation 1 on involvement and recommendation 3 on resourcing. However, work is underway to make improvements on recommendation 2 on collaboration and recommendation 4 on monitoring and reviewing effectiveness. On recommendation 2, this is addressed in this report by identifying and mapping stakeholders including partners. On recommendation 4, details of benefits realised with specific emphasis on suitable measures are included in the Benefits Realisation section of this report. This reflects that specific, quantifiable measures were not included in the strategy and that these will be helpful with the intention to improve upon further over time.

2. Benefits Realisation

As detailed above, this area needs some further development to identify the benefits achieved, especially those that can be measured. Further details are included in **Appendix 3**.

1.1. Digital Transformation

Work in this theme has resulted in a number of benefits realised. These includes a better understanding of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and automation capabilities. The redevelopment of the Council's website provides improved usability, design and accessibility standards. The Microsoft Teams Phone corporate rollout enhances the existing telephony facilities, providing increased flexibility and mobility via a new facility to make or receive calls on any device where Microsoft Teams is installed. We have developed a greater understanding of how assistive technologies can support improved independence support. Cloud migrations improve resilience and availability of systems.

1.2. Digital Skills and Inclusion

Access to free digital skills courses via our Adult Community Learning service reduces barriers for citizens to improve their digital skills. We continue to provide digital inclusion by means of public Wi-Fi in around 50 public buildings at the same time as realising financial savings from a different delivery model. We also do this by means of free bus Wi-Fi. Libraries and hubs continue to provide free access to devices at those locations. Strong partnership working in this theme has been developed and signposting of activities is an important benefit of this approach.

1.3. Data and Collaboration

The Council has numerous technical and organisational measures to protect data from cyber and other threats. Raised awareness of data protection and cyber security is key activity including for schools. The numerous preventative measures we have in place ensures good business continuity and cyber resilience. We continue to support the organisation in evidence-based decision making and the improved visibility and transparency of performance data.

1.4. Digital Infrastructure and Connectivity

As a result of investment by suppliers, improved broadband and mobile connectivity has been realised within the city. Connectivity for the Local Broadband Fund (LBF) project has brought major benefits in the 3 adult care homes. A new supplier has been awarded the contract for the Community Safety Network that provides improved performance and resilience. Cloud migrations also have resulted in improved availability and resilience.

3. Action Plan

A summary of the most significant actions planned in 24/25 are included below:-

Action	Deadline
Digital Strategy Progress	
Digital Transformation	
Microsoft CoPilot – consider future use and funding	Sep 24
Robotic Process Automation (RPA) – roll out of RPA development in Housing and Communities	Oct 24
Robotic Process Automation (RPA) - further opportunities for the use of Robotic Process Automation (RPA) need to be considered	On-going
Web Site Redevelopment – completion of final phases of the redevelopment of the Council's web site	Mar 25
"Smart Hub" – develop plans for the longer term given its potential to improve independence and reduce costs	Mar 25
Automated Document Translation solution – to be updated and rolled out	Oct 24
Microsoft Teams Phone – complete the roll out of Microsoft Teams Phone	Dec 24
Climate Change Digital Elements – develop and progress digital elements of the Council's climate change plan working with SRS	On-going
Customer Contact Review – implementation of further improvements as a result of this review	Mar 25
Digital Skills and Inclusion	
Digital Skills courses – the Adult and Community learning service continues to deliver digital skills courses as part of its offering.	On-going
Library PC Access - Council libraries will continue to provide free public access to internet enabled PCs	On-going
Free Public Building Wi-Fi – continue review of free public building Wi-Fi service to remove duplication with corporate connectivity and realise savings whilst continuing to provide an important service	On-going
Bus Wi-Fi - provide free Wi-Fi on Newport buses funded by the Council and Newport Transport	On-going
Tablet Loan Scheme – develop a suitable scheme for roll out across libraries	Dec 24
Digital Champions - enhance the role of Council digital champions to improve support for employees	On-going
Data and Collaboration	
PSN - Assess results of 2024 Annual IT Health Check and develop plans to address vulnerabilities	Oct 24
PCI - carry out assessment and any necessary work to ensure compliance with new version 4 PCI security standards	Sep 24
Decision making, service delivery and planning is facilitated by better use of data - continue to take a 'whole organisation approach' to effectively using evidence and data to inform decision-making through use of the Transformation and Intelligence team's services	On-going
Data protected against cyber attacks and other threats - includes regular training and e-learning for staff, continued use of MetaCompliance solution to support and improve user awareness through training and phishing simulations.	On-going
Schools support – schools are supported in sound information management, cyber resilience and information security	On-going
Council's Management Information (MI) Hub performance management system - work to improve user accessibility, monitoring and reporting via the system	On-going

Digital Infrastructure and Connectivity	
Digital infrastructure of the city – continue to be supportive of developments in the digital infrastructure of the city including broadband and mobile coverage	On-going
Local Broadband Fund (LBF) – complete roll out of care management system to complement improved infrastructure and connectivity	Jan 25
Cloud Services – the Council will proactively look to migrate systems to the cloud as the preferred option when practical and affordable	On-going
Capital Programme – development and implementation of capital programme for major infrastructure, mainly for wireless infrastructure replacement this year	On-going
Community Safety Network (CCTV) – completion of new infrastructure implementation and service contract	Sep 24
Organisation, Governance and Funding	
Strategic Management - Digital Board to provide strategic management of the strategy and its progress	On-going
Progress Monitoring - progress against the strategy outcomes and actions managed by the Digital team and to be reported in Annual Digital Report	Sep 24
SRS Boards - represent Council at Shared Resource Service (SRS) Board meetings	On-going
Relationship Management - continue to develop relationship between Council and SRS especially in relation to the delivery of anticipated outcomes and actions in the new Digital Strategy.	On-going
Programming/Prioritisation of Work - continue to work with the SRS for the programming and prioritisation of projects, core planned and reactive work	On-going
Education/Schools Support – support Education service, schools and SRS in application of technology for schools in Newport	On-going
Digital Team Engagement - Digital team engagement with services and contribution to other plans and strategies throughout the organisation	On-going
IT Service (SRS) Performance	
Performance Management - monitor and manage performance between SRS and Digital team	On-going
SRS Report - SRS Report to Partnership Scrutiny Committee	Oct 24
Funding	
Best Use of Available Funding - opportunities to rationalise systems, infrastructure and licences need to be reviewed to ensure the continued best use of available funding	On-going

Appendix 1 – Organisation and Governance

IT Service – Shared Resource Service (SRS)

The IT Service became a partner in the Shared Resource Service (SRS) on 1/4/2017 so Newport City Council has been a partner for seven years. The SRS is also made up of Torfaen County Borough Council, Monmouthshire County Council, Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council and Gwent Police. There is SRS representation on the various Council groups including the Digital Board, Information Governance Group and project boards. The Digital team provides the link between the Council and the SRS. The partnership is developing positively.

Digital Services

The Digital team sits in the People, Policy and Transformation service area and is complemented by the existing Information Management team and Complaints team to form Digital Services.

The Digital team plays a key role for the Council. It provides the link between the Council and the SRS for IT work and always aims to add value in the process. It maintains an important relationship with the SRS and undertakes a client management role on behalf of the Council including performance management with the SRS. It has a strategic role for the Council as demonstrated in its lead on the new Digital Strategy. It has an important part to play in the Digital Board and contributed to various project boards. The team also manage a number of “retained” IT budgets including contracts for most large IT applications (financials, HR etc.), a PC replacement budget for the Council and a capital programme for major infrastructure updates.

The Digital team also has a more operational/tactical role. This role is around:-

- reactive incidents
- core planned work to maintain the existing IT infrastructure
- projects
- compliance including Public Services Network (PSN)

In all these areas the Digital team manages the escalation and prioritisation with the SRS as necessary, working with services on behalf of the Council. It also provides general advice and guidance to the Council and plays a key communications role. This role is an important one for the Council and the relationship with the SRS which continues to improve.

Service Areas

Service Areas use a number of IT systems to operate their services. Services are responsible for the information stored in their respective systems and to maximise the benefits of technology in conjunction with Digital and the SRS. Over recent years this includes working with Service Areas in a more proactive migration of IT systems to the cloud. The development of the Digital Strategy included a large amount of engagement with internal stakeholders to incorporate their priorities in the strategy and future plans.

Newport City Council Groups

Digital Board

This officer board provides and supports the strategic direction for the Council on digital matters. The role of the board has been reviewed, its terms of reference updated and membership revised. The role of the board is primarily now to oversee the implementation of the digital strategy <http://>. When necessary the role of the board is to prioritise large scale projects. The Board is chaired by Head of People, Policy and Transformation and comprises representatives from areas across the organisation and SRS.

Digital Champions

The Council has approximately 30 “Digital Champions” who are advocates for the use of digital technology. They provide a key contact point for services using digital technology. They were a key part of the testing for internet filtering migration, web browser compatibility, Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) for mobile devices, desk booking application testing etc. The intention is to enhance the role of Council digital champions to improve support for employees.

Schools

Schools fund their own IT provision and the majority use the in house schools service provided by the Shared Resource Service (SRS) although a number have provision from other service providers. A strategic group called the Schools IT Strategic Group with representation from schools, the Education service, Shared Resource Service and Digital meets regularly. The group has the following roles:-

- ensure that the ICT Strategic Group is kept informed of digital developments in education, identifying new opportunities and trends
- identify and support opportunities to innovate and share best practice, particularly in the use of Hwb and assist with the provision of professional learning opportunities and development of case studies
- support the ICT Strategic Group in researching what digital technology could help and enhance provision in schools
- provide professional advice from a teaching and learning perspective on the suitability and use of digital devices in schools

This strategic group focuses on the development of the IT provision in schools and recognises the importance of this to effective teaching and learning. Welsh Government provided additional funding designed to improve the infrastructure of schools under the “EdTech” programme. This and other initiatives have been progressed with the Education service, Shared Resource Service and Digital.

Shared Resource Service Organisation and Governance

SRS Governance Arrangements

The SRS has three boards. All documents are available to members of all boards to improve communication and transparency. The three boards are as follows:-

Strategic Board

This purpose of this board is to set the Strategic Direction of the SRS. It provides collective challenge to the Business and Collaboration Board around alignment to the SRS Strategy and identifying collaborative opportunities across all partners. It provides collective challenge to the Finance and Governance Board around alignment to the SRS Strategy and assurance to all partners. It provides collective challenge to the SRS Chief Operating Officer to drive forward SRS strategic principles. NCC is represented on this board by the Chief Executive and the Cabinet Member for Organisational Transformation. The Strategic Board provides updates on audits, performance as well as progress on the annual tactical plan. This Board has identified five strategic projects that are now being progressed.

Business and Collaboration Board

The purpose of this board is to provide collective challenge to the SRS Chief Operating Officer to drive forward the SRS strategic principles including to deliver effective ICT services from a single combined unit and operate as one SRS, to improve services to provide a solid foundation upon which partner organisations can operate, to ensure the investment in technology is focused on delivery of the corporate priorities of the partner organisations, to develop a capable, professional workforce that can meet the challenges within technology over the coming years and to provide a collaborative platform for public sector organisations to share common ground. NCC is represented on this board by the Head of People, Policy and Transformation and the Digital Services Manager. The Business and Collaboration Board provides an overview of performance, the annual tactical plan together with opportunities for collaborative working across partners on an informal and formal level.

Finance and Governance Board

The purpose of this board is to assure the Strategic Board that the SRS is delivering value for money, support the development of a medium term financial plan for the SRS, support the audit programme at the SRS and receive updates from audit in relation to the combined audit programme, provide collective challenge to each other around alignment to the SRS Strategy. It also provides collective challenge to the SRS Chief Operating Officer to drive forward the SRS strategic principles. NCC is represented on this board by the Head of Finance. The Finance and Governance Board provides updates on audits, SRS budget monitoring and agrees annual partner budgets.

These boards continue to mature with a strong sense of collaboration. All decisions made by boards need agreement by all partners. Developing a strategic, cohesive vision for all partners is challenging despite each partner's commitment to the partnership and its aims. An Audit Wales report into the partnership identified an increased level of consistency of vision and direction.

In addition to the three boards there is also a Delivery Group.

Delivery Group

The SRS holds four weekly Delivery Group meetings with each partner separately. At these meetings, performance data is reviewed with individual partners and work is prioritised for the next four week period. NCC is represented by its client function led by the Head of People, Policy and Transformation. The focus of these meetings is being shifted to more strategic initiatives.

Information Security Leadership Board

Newport attends a cross SRS partner information governance forum that complements our internal officer Information Governance Group.

Appendix 2 – Stakeholder Mapping

Power/impact	Interest/influence	
	Low	High
High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welsh Government • UK Government • Regulators (ICO, Audit Wales etc.) • Key Council/SRS suppliers • Mobile Network Operators • Broadband providers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cabinet Member • Senior Management • Shared Resource Service (SRS) including boards • Digital Board
Low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Higher Education - University of South Wales (USW) etc. • Further Education – Coleg Gwent etc. • Digital Inclusion Alliance Wales (DIAW) • Good Things Foundation • Other Council/SRS suppliers • Gwent Regional Partnership • Health Boards including Aneurin Bevan University Health Board • Registered Social Landlords (RSL's) • Cwmpas • Gwent Association of Voluntary Organisations (GAVO) • Citizens Advise Bureau (CAB) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Digital Board members • Council Services • Councillors • WLGA Digital Team • Council Digital Champions • Centre for Digital Public Services (CDPS) • Digital Communities Wales

Appendix 3 – Benefits Realisation

Theme	Outcome	Project/Activity	Benefits realised	Measures
Digital Transformation	Services transformed by the innovative use of digital technology	Microsoft CoPilot pilot project	Better understanding of the opportunities for Microsoft CoPilot and its Artificial Intelligence (AI) capabilities	
		Microsoft Teams Phone corporate rollout	This enhances the existing facilities by providing a new facility to make or receive calls on any device where Microsoft Teams is installed	4 of 11 service areas implemented to date
		Robotic Process Automation (RPA)	Increased staff productivity and ability to focus on higher value tasks. Improved accuracy and speed of processing that can enhance the customer experience. Supports future efficiency savings.	
		Smart Hub/Assistive technologies	Better understanding of the benefits of this technology and wider awareness amongst public	
		Document translation solution	Pilot in the use of automated document translation solution highlights likely costs savings and improved speed of translation	Direct cost per translation reduced by over 99%
	Digital solutions that are innovative, effective and easy to use	First phase of the redevelopment of the Council's website	Improved design, layout and content based on user experience, research and best practice. Enhanced search functionality and content with a lower reading age	
	Digital solutions that are available 24x7 from anywhere	New finance system	Improved features and integration, resilience, business continuity and green benefits	
		Cloud migrations	Improved resilience, business continuity and green benefits	
	Digital solutions that meet design, accessibility, Welsh Language and other standards	First phase of the redevelopment of the Council's website	The new Council website is now fully bilingual and meets design and accessibility standards which is a major improvement over the old website	Google Lighthouse audit Performance Loading times 97/100 Accessibility 100/100 Best Practices 100/100

	The council's web site is the preferred channel for customers, together with council app	Customer Contact Review	Better understanding of customer interactions and areas for improvement	
Digital Skills and Inclusion	Improved digital skills for citizens and businesses	Digital Skills courses	Free digital skills courses provided by Adult Community Learning	
	Improved digital inclusion by providing free public Wi-Fi and signposting free data available	Public Wi-Fi	Maintained similar level of service for digital inclusion purposes whilst realising financial savings	Estimated £70k p.a. saved from 24/25 onwards
	Services that are joined up across partners	Membership of Digital Inclusion Alliance Wales and Right Skills Board	Appropriate signposting of relevant activities. Increased awareness of Council and partner offerings	
Data and Collaboration	People have confidence in the Council's management of their data	PSN compliance	PSN compliance achieved for June 2023-June 2025.	
		PCI compliance	PCI compliance from September 2023 – September 2024	
	Decision making, service delivery and planning is facilitated by better use of data	Support delivery of Asset Rationalisation Programme	Improved use of evidence for planning purposes	
	Data protected against cyber attacks and other threats	SOC/SIEM system implemented	Improved, proactive monitoring of network activity and appropriate response	
		Training and awareness raising for employees and members	Improved awareness of cyber and other threats	

	Schools are supported in sound information management, cyber resilience and information security	SOC/SIEM system implemented	Improved, proactive monitoring of network activity and appropriate response	
		Service Level Agreement provided for information management and support from Education service	Improved awareness in schools and support available	
	Improved transparency with council data made available that facilitates the use of data	Development work of the use of the Council's MI Hub (Management Information Hub) system	Improved visibility and transparency of key reporting	
Digital Infrastructure and Connectivity	Excellent connectivity in the city due to increased investment in city's digital infrastructure	2 full fibre providers rolling out in the city in addition to existing major providers	Improved broadband coverage in the city	
		Roll out of 5G mobile networks	Improved mobile phone coverage in the city	
	Council Services are delivered by fast and reliable networks	CCTV network	Improved network performance and connectivity	Cost avoidance over previous supplier
		Local Broadband Fund	Improved network connectivity and in building Wi-Fi	
	Building Infrastructure that Supports a Flexible and Agile Workforce	Capital refresh programme agreed	Improvement to AV facilities in Committee Room 1. Improved network connectivity in Council buildings and opportunities for energy saving	