

GOVERNANCE & AUDIT COMMITTEE: 23rd January 2024

“Digital Strategy Review: Cardiff Council” Report issued November 2023 by Audit Wales

AGENDA ITEM: 7.3

REPORT OF THE CHIEF DIGITAL OFFICER

Reason for this Report

1. The Governance and Audit Committee’s Terms of Reference requires that Members:
 - Consider the Council’s framework of assurance and ensure that it adequately addresses the risk and priorities of the Council.
 - Consider the Council’s arrangements to secure value for money and review assurances and assessments on the effectiveness of these arrangements.
 - Consider specific reports as agreed with the external auditors.
 - Comment on the scope and depth of external audit work and to ensure it gives value for money.
 - Consider commissioning additional work from internal and external audit.
2. This report has been prepared to provide Governance and Audit Committee Members with an overview of the findings of the report of the Auditor General for Wales.

Background

3. Audit Wales reviewed the “Council’s strategic approach to digital, and specifically the extent to which this has been developed in accordance with the sustainable development principle; and that it will help to secure value for money in the use of the Council’s resources.”
4. The Project Brief was provided by Audit Wales in April 2023 and is included within Appendix A to this report.
5. The Project Brief advised that:
 - Digital is key to delivering a wide range of council services in a more economic, efficient and effective way. It follows that it is also an important means of councils delivering their wellbeing objectives and carrying out sustainable development.
 - Digital strategies also have a significant impact on how people access services, whether through improved access to services or the potential for ‘digital exclusion’

where services are 'digitised' but as a consequence some members of the public may be unable to access them.

- This work also builds on our previous 'springing forward' review that looked at the topics of assets and workforce that we undertook during 2021-22. We are undertaking this audit at each of the 22 principal councils in Wales.

Audit Objectives

6. The objectives for the audit were to:

- Provide assurance that the councils' digital strategies will help to deliver well-being objectives in a way that secures value for money in the use of resources;
- Provide assurance that councils are acting in accordance with the sustainable development principal in the design of their digital strategies;
- Explain how councils are using/planning to use digital technology to meet people's needs and deliver better outcomes; and
- Inspire and empower councils and other public sector bodies by identifying and sharing examples of notable practice/approaches where relevant

Issues

Findings

7. The findings of the audit are based on document reviews and interviews with a sample of cabinet Members and senior officers. The evidence used to inform the findings is limited to these sources. Audit Wales undertook this work during April to July 2023, and the Digital Strategy Review Report is included within Appendix B.

Identified Areas of good practice

- The digital strategy clearly articulates its approach and seeks to deliver benefits by exploring new ways of working, increasing service accessibility and improving customer service
- The Council has drawn on a wide range of information (internal and external) to develop the strategy. Data is used to understand current demographic trends to help target those residents in need of support
- The council scans for future technologies which may help in advancing the strategy
- The council also uses internal data from across the organisation to identify how citizens access services across the many channels available
- The digital strategy is integrated with key priorities such as Hybrid working and the One Planet strategy and aligns with the Council's wellbeing objectives
- The council works with a wide range of partners through its approach to digital e.g agile workstations with EME services, joint housing allocations scheme, social landlords and initiatives in higher education
- There are positive examples where the council allocates resources to secure better outcomes over the long term, for example through the single view of the child project
- The Council is sharing lessons learnt with other councils

Key findings

- The Council has a mature strategic approach to digital, but this lacks clear timebound objectives. It is planning over an appropriate timescale based on an analysis of current and future trends but has not clearly set out the anticipated short- or long-term impacts of its digital strategy. In the absence of short medium- and long-term objectives for its digital strategy it is difficult for the Council to monitor and evaluate progress against its digital strategy over the medium and longer-term.
- The Council has not directly engaged with its citizens in developing its digital strategy. Not involving the full diversity of those with an interest in the development and delivery of the digital strategy risks the design of approaches that do not meet the needs of citizens nor will deliver value for money.
- The delivery of the strategy is monitored on a project-by-project basis. As such the resource implications, service user satisfaction and impacts have not been analysed and collated to provide effective corporate oversight of the strategy and its achievements. This makes it difficult for the Council to monitor progress in delivering the strategy as well as understanding the overall impact and value for money of the Council's strategic approach to digital.

Recommendations

Strengthening the evidence base

R1 To help ensure that its next digital strategy is well informed and that its resources are effectively targeted, in developing its strategy the Council should draw on evidence from a wider range of sources, including greater involvement of stakeholders with an interest in the digital strategy.

Identifying resource implications

R2 To help ensure that its next digital strategy is deliverable and to help monitor value for money the Council should identify the short and long-term resource implications of delivering it together with any intended efficiency savings.

Arrangements to improve corporate oversight

R3 To enable better corporate oversight and assessment of value for money from its next digital strategy, the Council should strengthen its arrangements for monitoring both progress in delivering the strategy and its overall impact over the short, medium and longer term.

Management Response

8. The following paragraphs set out the considered management response in order to address the recommendations arising from the report.

R1 Strengthening the evidence base

In the development of the next digital strategy Cardiff will be completing the following activities

- Engaging through consultation with internal stakeholders to identify digital activities planned or taking place to identify the following:

- Drivers for change – Efficiency, Process improvements or better outcomes for citizens.
- Current and planned resource levels with associated funding
- What additional support would be required – training, project management, data collection and analysis etc
- The organisation will continue its work in engaging with Citizens to help shape the strategy's priorities:
 - Analyse the feedback from the latest “Digital” survey to understand the current habits and expectations from Citizens
 - Use the Digital Exclusion Risk Index to help identify where citizen may need the greatest assistance to access the digital offer
 - Consult with the City on the proposals in the new strategy to ensure that it will meet the needs of the city and deliver value.

R2 - Identifying resource implications

Once the internal consultation is completed Cardiff will be better placed to identify the basis for its digital activities. We will identify what resources are currently in place, the cost of these roles and skills associated. We will look to formalise the training plans for staff to ensure they are sufficiently competent in delivering digital projects both through extending agile training but also leaning on DDaT roles and skills base to ensure suitably skilled staff are employed.

Plans will be monitored financially over the short and long term to ensure efficiency savings as a result of the work are measured and checked against the business cases upon which they are based.

A digital leads network will be created to ensure that any opportunities to share resources and skills are maximised.

R3 Arrangements to improve corporate oversight

Once information gathering through directorates is complete the activities will be mapped and tracked. Updates on progress will be reviewed through the existing Digital Board structure using the existing Portfolio, Programme and Project management database within the organisation.

Projects will be reviewed for their measures of success both against achievability and to ensure that they are delivering within the expected timeframes.

Legal Implications

9. There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.

Financial Implications

10. There are no direct financial implications arising from this report. The next Digital Strategy will need to be supported by the required budget provision, to include identified efficiency savings.

RECOMMENDATIONS

11. That the Committee notes and considers the content of the report.

Isabelle Bignall – Chief Digital Officer

The following are attached:

- Appendix A: Project Brief (Draft) – Digital Strategy Review – Cardiff Council (Audit Wales)
- Appendix B: Digital Strategy Review – Cardiff Council (Audit Wales)
- Appendix C: Organisational Response Form – Cardiff Council (Audit Wales / Cardiff Council)