

Digital Strategy Review – Cardiff Council

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Digital strategy review

Report summary

Exhibit 1: Report Summary

The exhibit below summarises the reason why we undertook this audit, our key findings and recommendations for the Council.

Why a strategic approach to digital is important.

- 1 Digital technology is key to delivering a wide range of council services in a more economic, efficient and effective way, it is also an important means for councils to deliver their wellbeing objectives and carry out sustainable development.
- 2 Having a clearly articulated strategic approach to digital can bring several benefits such as:
 - establishing a common vision for use of digital and the intended outcomes for local communities linked to the council's strategic objectives.
 - helping to ensure that councils use of digital technology is aligned with their key strategic objectives and other plans and strategies and is informed by a good understanding of current and future trends.
 - reducing the risk of duplication both within councils and with partners.
 - consideration of coordinated resourcing of digital over the short, medium and longer term
 - providing a framework against which to monitor progress over the short, long and medium term

The focus of our audit

- 3 We looked at the extent to which the Council's strategic approach to digital has been developed in accordance with the sustainable development principle and whether it will help to secure value for money in the use of the Council's resources.

Our key findings

- 4 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.

- 5 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.
- 6 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.

Our recommendations for the Council

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.

Detailed report

What we looked at – the scope of this audit

- 1 We 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.
- 2 Our findings are based on document reviews and interviews with a sample of cabinet Members and senior officers. The evidence we have used to inform our findings is limited to these sources. We undertook this work during April to July 2023.
- 3 We set out to answer the question '**In developing its digital strategy has the Council acted in accordance with the sustainable development principle and put in place proper arrangements to secure value for money in the use of its resources?**' We did this by exploring the following questions:
 - Is the Council's digital strategy informed by a good understanding of current and future trends?
 - Does the Council have a clear vision of what it wants to achieve through the use of digital technology?
 - Is the Council working effectively with the right people and partners to design and deliver its digital strategy?
 - Has the Council resourced delivery of its digital strategy so it can deliver long-term/preventative benefits?
 - Is the Council monitoring and reviewing progress?
 - Is the Council learning lessons from how it works?
- 4 **Appendix 1** sets out the detailed questions we set out to answer along with the audit criteria we used to arrive at our findings.

Why we undertook this audit

- 5 This audit was undertaken to help fulfil the Auditor General's duties under section 17 of the Public Audit (Wales) Act 2004 (the 2004 Act) and section 15 of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.
- 6 We sought to:
 - provide assurance that 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 principle 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.

The Council's digital strategy

- 7 The Council's Digital Strategy was adopted in 2018 and is due to be replaced by the end of 2023-24. It is a high-level document intended to provide guidance to support the Cardiff Council's ambition to digitalise services.
- 8 The Strategy focuses on delivering the Council's wellbeing objective 'modernising and integrating public services' which the Council considers central to the achievement of all other WBO's.
- 9 It is based on six principles:
 - the customer experience comes first;
 - digital interactions will become the first choice for our customers;
 - modern, fit-for purpose technology will be used to ensure efficiency;
 - technology solutions will be reused, purchased and developed responsibly;
 - digital services will support collaborative working to improve outcomes for our customers; and
 - digital services will be continually monitored, assessed and improved.
- 10 The digital vision for Cardiff is 'a connected city in which new technologies empower citizens to get the best from services that matter to them'.
- 11 The strategy is further supported by summaries which emphasise the importance of digital connectivity with stakeholders which is illustrated with specific examples and performance data from 2018-19. These include the connected citizen, management, workforce, partners, businesses and education and provides a bases for comparison of performance at the start of the strategy.

What we found

The Council has a mature strategic approach to digital, but this lacks clear timebound objectives informed by service users to enable corporate oversight of its impact

The Council is planning over an appropriate timescale but has not clearly set out the anticipated short- or long-term impacts of its digital strategy

- 12 The Council is planning over an appropriate timescale. It has considered what long-term means for its digital approach and has adopted a five-year timeframe to reflect digital technology is constantly changing at an ever-increasing pace. There are examples of longer-term thinking where the Council is investing to deliver benefits over the longer term. These include an increased presence of chatbot across the council's website and an increasing number of new services released on Cardiff Gov app. Planning for the longer term will reduce the risk of reliance on short-term interventions that may provide less value for money over the longer term.
- 13 The Council's digital strategy clearly articulates its strategic approach, seeking to deliver benefits by exploring new ways of working, increasing service accessibility, and improving customer service. However, the strategy does not set out the anticipated short- or long-term impacts of its approach with milestones against which to measure progress. It is therefore unclear how the Council will be able to effectively evaluate the impact and value for money of the strategy.

The Council is drawing on data from a broad range of sources, but has not engaged with citizens, in developing its digital strategy

- 14 The Council is drawing on a wide range of information from internal and external sources to develop its digital strategy. It uses external data to help understand current and future demographic trends in Cardiff to help target those residents in need of more support. It also scans the external environment and liaises with its partners to identify future technological advances which may be helpful in advancing its strategy.
- 15 It also uses internal data based on an understanding of current IT systems in place across the organisation and collects data to identify how citizens access council services across the many channels open to them.
- 16 The Council has not directly engaged with citizens in developing its digital strategy. It therefore follows that the Council has also not engaged with the full

diversity of those with an interest in the digital strategy, including groups who share protected characteristics.

- 17 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. It is important for the Council to use this data to inform its strategic approach to digital, including how it could address the root causes of problems.

The Council's strategic approach to digital is integrated with its key strategies and wellbeing objectives and demonstrates how it is working with partners to address short- and long-term challenges

- 18 The Council's digital strategy is integrated with its key strategic priorities. For example, its hybrid working policy and One Planet Cardiff strategy, by assisting staff to adopt agile working to help reduce the carbon impact of its staff commute. It is also aligned with the Council's Wellbeing objectives with digital being seen as key to supporting their delivery. Integrated plans and strategies can help reduce duplication and identify opportunities to deliver multiple benefits.
- 19 The Council is working with a wide range of partners through its approach to digital. For example, on agile workstations with emergency services, a joint housing allocation scheme with registered social landlords and several initiatives with higher education. Working collaboratively can assist in delivering better outcomes and value for money through sharing and pooling expertise, resources and information.

The Council has not set out the resource implications of delivering its digital strategy but is investing in projects that will accrue benefits over the medium and longer term

- 20 The Council has not set out the anticipated resource implications of delivering it vulnerable children through better sharing of data across some Council departments and with police partners. s digital strategy in the short, medium, and long term, including any intended savings. In the context of significant savings requirements, the Council manages its resources to deliver its digital strategy on a project-by-project basis which sets out costs and benefits over the life of the project. Not identifying the resource implications and intended financial benefits of its strategy increases the risk of the strategy not being delivered and reduces the ability of the Council to monitor the extent to which it is delivering value for money.
- 21 There are, however, examples where the Council is allocating resources to secure better outcomes over the long term. For example, through the 'single view of the child project'. This aims to improve arrangements for safeguarding

Whilst the Council monitors delivery of individual projects it does not monitor the delivery and overall impact of its digital strategy

- 22 The digital strategy does not have clear short, medium and long-term objectives against which progress can be monitored.
- 23 The Council has set up a Digital Cardiff Board to monitor delivery of the strategy. The Board is chaired by the Chief Executive and is attended by the senior management team to drive forward the Digital First agenda. However, it monitors at a detailed corporate and directorate project level and meets on a basis dictated by need to unblock issues. It does not monitor the costs and benefits of delivering its digital strategy as a whole.
- 24 The Council's Cabinet and Senior Management Team who are accountable for delivering the digital agenda and the Cabinet Member for Finance, Modernisation and Performance who is responsible for overseeing the delivery of the digital programme do not have a framework available to them to enable corporate oversight of the delivery of the digital strategy.
- 25 Monitoring the delivery and impact of its digital strategy overall is an important part of arrangements to secure value money. This makes it difficult for the Council to monitor the overall impact and value for money of its strategic approach.

The Council is sharing lessons learnt with other councils and assesses the effectiveness of delivering digital projects internally but has not used this information to assess impacts from delivering its strategy

- 26 The Council is sharing lessons learnt with other councils but has not regularly reviewed the effectiveness of its strategic approach to digital although we recognise that this arrangement was interrupted due to the pandemic.
- 27 During the lifecycle of the strategy between 2018 and 2023-24 it conducted an annual update in 2019-20 to review the work completed in the first year. It then reviewed lessons learned from its response to the pandemic during 2021-22 and applied this learning to a refresh of its digital strategy.
- 28 It has also looked to other councils and their approaches to delivering digital initiatives such as data warehousing and Robotic Process Automation. The Council also regularly reviews the effectiveness of delivering specific projects.
- 29 This information has not been used to assess any organisation wide impacts from delivering its digital strategy such as:
 - effectiveness of its collaborative activity, including sharing resources improving resilience and avoiding duplication;
 - effectiveness of its involvement activity, including the impact of the strategy on service users including those who are digitally excluded;
 - the impact of the strategy on those who share protected characteristics; and

- the economy, efficiency and effectiveness of the digital strategy overall in helping the Council to achieve its strategic objectives.
- 30 Regularly reviewing the effectiveness of its strategic approach to digital overall would strengthen the Council's ability to identify opportunities to improve the impact and value for money of its approach.

Appendix 1

Audit questions and audit criteria

Below are the questions we sought to answer in carrying out this audit, along with the audit criteria we used to arrive at our findings.

Main audit question: **In developing its digital strategy has the Council acted in accordance with the sustainable development principle and put in place proper arrangements to secure value for money in the use of its resources?**

Exhibit 2: audit questions and audit criteria

Level 2 questions	Level 3 questions	Criteria
1. Is the Council's digital strategy informed by a good understanding of current and future trends?	1.1 Is there is a thorough understanding of the 'as is' (ie current demand/issues to be addressed) and the reasons why/underlying causes?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council has drawn on a broad range of information from internal and external sources to develop a thorough understanding of the 'as is' and how it is likely to change. This includes information (including data) relating to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – service sustainability/resilience and resourcing challenges. – the needs of citizens and communities. – the underlying causes of current demand/issues to be addressed. – analysis of future trends and how they might impact, eg social, economic/political, environmental, cultural or technological. They might include known trends eg ageing population, depleting natural resources and particularly technological advances. They might also include those with a higher level of uncertainty eg jobs and skills needed in the future. • The analysis of the 'as is' and how it is likely to change is well informed by involvement activity, as appropriate, that reflects recognised good practice (eg National Principles for Public Engagement in Wales, Future Generations Commissioner for Wales advice and guidance).
	1.2 Is there a thorough understanding of the long-term factors that will impact and the challenges and opportunities that may result (eg risks and opportunities)?	

Level 2 questions	Level 3 questions	Criteria
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council uses its evidence base effectively to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – identify actions in its strategic approach to digital that are likely to be most effective and why, including how they could address the root causes of problems; – inform decisions around its use of digital technology that seek to balance the need to meet short and longer-term objectives.
<p>2. Does the Council have a clear vision of what it wants to achieve through the use of digital technology?</p>	<p>2.1 Is the Council planning over an appropriate timescale?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council has considered what long term means in planning its approach to digital – ie how far ahead it can/should plan and why (at least ten years with consideration of longer-term trends as appropriate). • The Council has considered how actions can deliver the best impact over that timeframe in terms of outcomes and most effective use of resources. This could include consideration of appropriate intervention points linked to the Commissioner’s definition of prevention. (More details can be found in: Taking account of the Well-being of Future Generations Act in the budget process – The Future Generations Commissioner for Wales). • The Council has set out measures for its digital strategy that reflect short and long-term impacts and value for money, with milestones that reflect progress as appropriate. • The Council has set out how its digital strategy will be resourced over the longer term as far as is practical (see also criteria relating to integration).
	<p>2.2 Has the Council thought about the wider impacts its digital strategy could have, including:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council has considered how its digital strategy can make a contribution across the well-being goals. • Staff developing the digital strategy understand what colleagues and partners do and how their work relates, and have sought to integrate their

Level 2 questions	Level 3 questions	Criteria
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • how it could contribute to each of the seven national well-being goals? • how delivery will impact on the other things it is trying to achieve (ie its well-being objectives and wider priorities)? • how delivery will impact on other what other public bodies are trying to achieve (ie their well-being objectives)? 	<p>work with that of their colleagues from across the Council and with partner organisations.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integration is evident in the alignment of the digital strategy with other key corporate strategies and service plans. For example medium-term financial plan, workforce plan, asset management strategies, well-being statement and carbon reduction plans. • The digital strategy is aligned with other strategic intents such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – customer experience; – management of demand/reductions in demand failure and prevention; and – design and implementation of new service delivery models. • The Council's digital strategy aligns with the plans/strategies of local and national partners including the Welsh Government's Digital Strategy for Wales Digital strategy and well-being plans.
	<p>2.3 Is there a wide and common understanding of what the Council is trying to achieve?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Councillors and senior officers responsible for implementing the digital strategy have a common and clear understanding of what the Council is trying to achieve and the intended impact on service delivery. • The Council's digital strategy is clearly communicated to staff and partners who may help deliver it.

Level 2 questions	Level 3 questions	Criteria
<p>3. Is the Council working effectively with the right people and partners to design and deliver its digital strategy</p>	<p>3.1 Has the Council identified who it needs to involve?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council has a good understanding of who will be directly and indirectly affected by its digital strategy and who it needs to involve. • The Council has effectively involved the full diversity of views in developing its digital strategy, including from non-traditional sources and from those it may have previously failed to reach.
	<p>3.2 Is the Council effectively involving the full diversity of people affected by its digital strategy?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council has provided genuine opportunities for people to influence the design and delivery of its digital strategy from an early stage, including representatives of groups who share protected characteristics. • The Council has used the results of involvement to shape the design and delivery of its digital strategy.
	<p>3.3 Is the Council collaborating effectively with the right partners?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council is collaborating to ensure it delivers better outcomes and value for money through its digital strategy and has put appropriate arrangements in place to support this, for example for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – sharing or pooling expertise and resources; – sharing information; – ensuring effective monitoring, evaluation and accountability including consideration of value for money.

Level 2 questions	Level 3 questions	Criteria
<p>4. Has the Council resourced delivery of its digital strategy so it can deliver long-term/preventative benefits?</p>	<p>4.1 Does the Council understand long-term resource implications?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council has assessed the costs and benefits of using digital technology to invest in long-term, preventative approaches and the cost (both financial and in terms of outcomes) of not doing so. • The Council has thought about the resources it will need to deliver its digital strategy over the medium and longer term (whole life costs) and how it could manage risks/meet those costs including, for example, planned 'invest to save' initiatives and managed reductions in technical debt. • The Council has calculated and set out any savings it intends to make through implementing its digital strategy.
	<p>4.2 Does the Council allocate resources to deliver better outcomes over the long-term?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Action (including preventative action) that is likely to contribute to better outcomes and/or use of resources over the longer term is promoted and supported, even: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – where this may limit the ability to meet some short-term needs; – where the benefits are likely to be accrued by or attributed to another organisation.

Level 2 questions	Level 3 questions	Criteria
5. Is the Council monitoring and reviewing progress?	5.1 Is the Council monitoring and reviewing progress towards, short, medium and longer-term objectives?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council monitors the costs and benefits of delivering its digital strategy from a value for money perspective. • The Council is measuring the wider contribution the digital strategy is making across its own/partnership objectives. • Progress is measured against short, medium and long-term objectives.
6. Is the Council learning lessons from how it works?	6.1 Does the Council review the effectiveness of its digital strategy?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council regularly reviews the effectiveness of its digital strategy including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – effectiveness of its collaborative activity; – effectiveness of its involvement activity, including the impact of the strategy on service users including those who are digitally excluded; – the impact of the strategy on those who share protected characteristics; – the economy, efficiency and effectiveness of the digital strategy overall in helping the Council to achieve its strategic objectives. • The Council has reviewed lessons learned from its response to the pandemic and is applying this learning to its digital strategy.
	6.2 Does the Council share lessons learned from its approach to its digital strategy?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council shares and applies any lessons learned from the development and delivery of its digital strategy widely across the organisation, and with partners where relevant.



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