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Venue: Council Chamber, Shirehall, Abbey Foregate, Shrewsbury, SY2 6ND

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COUNCIL

TO FOLLOW REPORT (S)

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Report of the Portfolio Holder for Digital, Data & Insight and Built Housing

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Rob Gittins

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Committee and Date

Council 7th July 2022

Item

Public

Report of the Portfolio Holder – Digital, Technology and Data and Insight

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1. Synopsis

This document identifies some of the work undertaken within the Digital, Technology and Data and Insight Portfolio since May 2021 and details some of the aims and objectives for the future.

2. Executive Summary

The main areas included within this portfolio are set out in sections 3 to 7 of this report. The intention is to identify major areas of work, provide updates following the previous report to Council in May 2021 and to set out some of the key priorities for this portfolio area over the coming twelve months.

3. IT and Technology

The ICT team are continuing to support the council in all day-to-day operations, ensuring that systems remain available at all times and perform to a high standard. Worth noting are:

- World-wide supply chain issues mean that obtaining equipment (especially laptops) is currently problematical, with long lead times on orders;
- The cyber-threat environment remains unusually hostile, with our firewalls constantly repelling attempts at penetrating our defences. Two recent security incidents have highlighted the need for automated system monitoring; in one case a supplier provided a software update (a 'patch') which reversed a recent security update we had implemented, which in turn allowed a benign 'white hat' hacker to discover a vulnerability, which was reported to us and promptly fixed. In the other a 'zero day' vulnerability – a flaw not yet detected by the software supplier – was exploited, again by a benign hacker, and reported to us. In neither case was there data loss or system damage, but this has highlighted the need for enhanced, automated monitoring of our systems around the clock, and options for this are being explored.

- The importance of cyber awareness among our user base has never been higher, and strenuous efforts continue to get all staff and members to complete their on-line cyber-security training. Currently, the Council receives 60,000-70,000 emails per day, and around 15,000 (20%-25%) of these are blocked due to suspected malicious content. In addition, there are often between 25M and 50M attempts per day to connect into our external firewalls from all over the world. In terms of cyber-security training, as at 28 June, there are 3,300 user accounts within the Council, of which all but 25 users (including 10 Member accounts) have now completed training on cyber-security awareness. This is vital, because – despite the constant improvements and updates to our firewalls and security – the greatest weakness will always be an inadvertent response to an email or a hyperlink.
- A new Head of Service, Automation & Technology, will start at the council in September. David Baker is an experienced IT leader, and also a specialist in IT security. Paul Day will finish his interim role at the end of July, and is coordinating a handover before then. The automation of Council systems and operations is a priority for the team over the coming months, as discussed further in Section 5.

4. Information & Insight

The information and Insight team are pivotal for delivering the ambition to become a data led authority and enabling decisions to be made based on sound evidence. The team are working on a number of projects to develop the understanding of the people who live in Shropshire to inform the support we provide, ensuring the right information and processes are in place to make the wise choices for the way we run our services now and, in the future and to get the most out of data basing the decisions made on the strongest analysis, using data driven technology to transform our services.

The team has recently been restructured to support the increased demand and utilise skills sets to their full potential. For information and insight there are two teams one focused on performance and research and the other team focusing on data and reporting. Alongside this there is a team of business analysts and specialised project management.

The performance and research team deliver the corporate performance reports and are currently working with the service areas to define robust KPI's to support the Shropshire Plan. Adults and Social care performance monitoring and completion of statutory returns is a key part of the teams' work including support for the education teams. The team also provides the evidence base for the development of policy and strategy in economic growth and housing. The data and reporting team are responsible for the curation of all data and the delivery of interactive dashboards and analytics. The aim is to provide a single version of the truth, retrieving data from source, extract, transform and load, match multiple data sets using algorithms and machine learning. This includes collating not only internal data but partner data and external data. The team create interactive dashboards providing insights and analytics.

Achievements for last year include:

- Support through-out the Covid pandemic matching multiple data sets to support the identification of our most vulnerable citizens.
- Providing the capability and reporting for monitoring staff absences throughout the pandemic.
- Creating the mechanisms and reporting for the payment of grants throughout the pandemic and Local Welfare Funds.
- Delivering an Information Hub for ADASS which has received national recognition
- Providing the evidence base for the Economic Growth Strategy.
- Creating the first version of a single view of a child which matches multiple data sets including social care, education, housing, police etc Early Help are to use information to target interventions.
- Extracting data and providing reports for the Homes for Ukrainians.

For the future, the focus for information and insight is to continue with the transformation of the approach to reporting and analytics with automation, interactive dashboards, modelling, forecasting and predictive analytics. Through the matching of multiple data sets create the understanding of citizens to target support and services. Provide robust trend analysis to understand the past and the present and use this to project the future forecasts. Utilise the census 2021 data due to be released in the summer 2022 to re-baseline our demographic understanding of the county and create comprehensive profiles layering sources of data to support Shropshire's most vulnerable. Insight provided in this manner will be the driving force for many Council decisions in the future and is an emerging element of the Council's developing Target Operating Model.

5. Digital First

We are now living in the digital era. The new UK Government Digital Strategy (published on 13 June: [UK Digital Strategy - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/digital-strategy)) highlights the ways that digital technology has transformed our lives and will continue to do so. It explains that the UK's (and therefore Shropshire's) economic future, jobs, wage levels, prosperity, cost of living, productivity, and ability to compete are all reliant on continued and growing success in digital technology. This is recognised by the council, and the developing Target Operating Model includes a major theme of 'Digital County', addressing key elements including connectivity (broadband and mobile as identified in Section 6 below), skills in the community, the re-engineering of council back-office processes to take advantage of digital technology and automation, and of course more interaction with the council's customers through digital channels. The last area instinctively raises concerns about those who cannot (or prefer not) to interact with the council in this way, and so consideration is being given to the issues that a 'digital first' policy will raise, the benefits it will bring, and how any concerns can be addressed. This is also a developing theme for the Customer Services Centre (see below) and the subject of a Green Paper currently in preparation.

6. Infrastructure: Connecting Shropshire, Super-Fast Broadband, 5G

6.1. Digital Infrastructure – Connecting Shropshire

Summary of key headlines/achievements:

- Final superfast broadband contract (third of 3) with Airband is expected to complete by the end of 2022;
- European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development contract expected to complete by the end of 2022;
- ERDF Marches Business Broadband Grant Scheme now closed;
- £2m capital funding reinvested in Gigabit Broadband Top-up Voucher scheme;
- Project Gigabit Lot 25 launched with first procurements expected to commence during the summer 2022;
- West Mercia Rural 5G projected completing testing and trials in June 2022.

6.2. Superfast Broadband Contracts

Contract 3 was awarded to Airband Community Internet Ltd and is the last superfast contract managed by Shropshire Council. This contract is expected to close by the end of 2022.

Contract delivery has been delayed as a result of Airband's performance issues, together with relief events that have been applied to the contract, including Covid-19 and flooding. The consequence of these delays has no financial impact on Shropshire Council with all risk borne by Airband. The impact has been timescale delays which have frustrated expectant communities. In all cases executive escalations have been applied to improve Airband's remedial plans.

By the end of the contract, it's projected that Airband will have provided around 12,600 contracted premises with access to a superfast broadband connection (of which about 2,000 premises will have access to a 'fibre to the premises' broadband service). Additional premises in the area of contracted premises are also expected to benefit from the contract deployment as a result of state aided investment.

Superfast broadband coverage of the Shropshire Council area in 2014 was 24% with current coverage now standing at 98.44% (Source: [Thinkbroadband](#)). Coverage is projected to rise to 99% by the end of Airband's contract deployment and when added to other incidental commercial coverage from all broadband infrastructure providers.

6.3. EAFRD Marches & Gloucestershire Viable Clusters Broadband Project

Shropshire Council secured funds from DEFRA through the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD).

Around 800 Shropshire Council premises are expected to gain access to a 'fibre to the premises' broadband connection from the project in some of our most challenging rural areas around Ellesmere and Oswestry. This

project is also impacted by Airband delays, who are the main contractor. Projections suggest the contract will be closed by the end of the year. This contract is managed directly by Herefordshire Council which is the accountable body.

6.4. ERDF Marches Business Broadband Grant Scheme

In 2017 Shropshire Council secured funds from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) to support this project which is managed by Herefordshire Council. By the time the project closes in 2022, 75 ERDF-eligible businesses are projected to have benefited from faster broadband installations.

6.5. Gigabit Broadband Top-up voucher scheme

In order to provide additional support to premises without access to a good broadband connection, Shropshire Council has made up to £2m of additional funding available to 'top-up' the Gigabit Broadband Voucher Scheme in partnership with DCMS (Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport).

This strategic investment supports those premises currently not included in any Connecting Shropshire contract deployment and particularly those in our most rural areas. For homes/businesses, the maximum funding per voucher is £4,000 and £7,000 respectively. The Gigabit Broadband Voucher Scheme is administered by DCMS and not by Shropshire Council.

607 vouchers have been issued to date with a total value of £2,239,667 (of which £1,088,000 is from Shropshire capital top-up funding. 53 premises have been connected with 24 community schemes currently in the remaining pipeline to benefit.

The scheme has been put on hold since January 2022 as a direct result of BDUK (Building Digital UK) freezing the scheme whilst they undertook Project Gigabit procurement scoping.

6.6. Project Gigabit - Lot 25

Government's 'Project Gigabit' objective is for 85% of UK premises to be able to access a gigabit-capable broadband connection (1,000 megabits per second) by 2025 with as many as possible by 2033.

BDUK announced that Shropshire, incl. the Telford & Wrekin Council area were in Phase 1b (Lot 25) of the national 'Project Gigabit' programme.

BDUK are wholly responsible for Project Gigabit strategy, management and delivery, not Shropshire Council.

BDUK's Open Market Review completed in April 2021, followed by a Public Review exercise in September 2021. Shropshire Council responded to the formal process and raised a number of risks and concerns:

- Not all Shropshire Council premises are included in the scope of Lot 25;
- There is a 'high' risk that premises still awaiting a superfast broadband (30 megabits per second) connection may not be prioritised.

BDUK have concluded two rounds of Pre-Procurement Market Engagement (PPME) with potential suppliers. BDUK intends to issue the Invitation To Tender (ITT) this summer, potentially as early as July 2022.

Once the process commences it is our intention to fully review the data and assess the local implications to the identified risks. This will be used to then report fully to Cabinet later this year.

6.7. West Mercia Rural 5G

Following the successful award of DCMS funding in 2020 as part of the Rural Connected Communities 5G programme, Shropshire Council, together with partners, have participated in a two-year test & trial project to examine how emerging 5G technology could be used to deliver health and social care services in rural areas.

Whilst the original scope of the project had anticipated testing use cases in Shropshire-based care homes, changes by the original technical partner resulted in a subsequent rescoping of the coverage area that excluded the Shropshire Council area.

Shropshire Council have remained part of project board and have benefited from the learning and lessons participation. It has additionally allowed Shropshire Council to form wider networks that will be beneficial in addressing wider mobile connectivity challenges and also in developing further opportunities in the digital healthcare ecosystem.

A full exit report is currently being prepared by partners, with learning expected to be shared in the public domain following DCMS approvals.

7. Information Governance, Performance Management, Customer Services

7.1. Information Governance

The Information Governance Team continue to provide an important service within the Council, supporting corporate information governance and the specific requirements of service areas. This includes managing and assisting with requests both under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and for personal information under the Data Protection Act 2018.

Over the last 12 months the Team have processed a total of 91 subject access requests 1098 freedom of information requests. In particular, the Team play a key role in ensuring that the Council is compliant with the legislative timescales for responding.

In addition, the Team continues to respond to data breaches within the Council. It is vital that we have a clear process and policy in place to ensure all such breaches are reported, investigated and contained to meet our legal obligations. The Team have ensured these processes are in place and thoroughly investigate all breaches that occur. Over the last 12 months they have investigated 130 breaches, 7 of these were reported to the

Information Commissioner's Office all of which have been returned with no further action (though with some recommendations to implement).

The Team also provide support in relation to all areas of data protection legislation including the UK GDPR. A GDPR action plan was implemented by the Data Protection Officer when the GDPR was initially implemented to ensure full GDPR compliance. The Team also provide training for all staff and members regarding data protection and information governance issues, including cyber security. More than 95% of staff and 84% of members have now completed the new training.

For the future we want to ensure that there is an effective information governance strategy and framework in place, led by the SIRO. This is to raise the profile of information governance across the organisation further and to highlight its importance from a legal compliance perspective. In preparation for this change in approach we have already created a new Information Governance Leadership and Organisational Oversight Group (IGLOO). The purpose of this group (led by the SIRO) is to oversee and influence the development of an Information Governance, Data Protection and security agenda across the organisation.

In addition, we have also created an Information Governance and Information Security Group that meets regularly to discuss all issues relating to security policies, including cyber security and any other important issues relating to information governance more widely. This group effort is supported by key staff in the Information Governance Team and Cyber Security within the ICT Team (as identified in Section 3.)

The Team can also support and play a key role in achieving one of the key Council objectives around big data and using data we hold more effectively to help with projects in the wider public interest. We want to promote the appreciation of the value of data held by the Council and ensure it is utilised as much as possible within the constraints of any legislation and the Information Governance can support this objective by enabling it to happen in a lawful way. The Team have already worked on an important corporate project involving the use of data across the Council for the Early Help project (as mentioned in Section 4), ensuring that the data is shared in a lawful manner.

7.2. Performance Management

During the past year the development of the Shropshire Plan has seen the Council's priorities and strategic outcomes for the next 3 years to 2025 confirmed, as well as establishing the key overarching suite of strategic plans that set the direction for the organisation. The Council's Performance Management Framework (PMF) sits within these plans and has been revisited and reviewed using best practice.

The PMF sets out how the Council will maintain a focus on the delivery of the Council's priorities and strategic objectives, including progress in delivering projects that achieve the outcomes and outputs expected in the timescales set, and the achievement of targets and levels of performance.

It is reviewed frequently as a live document, being linked strongly to the delivery plans for the Shropshire Plan priorities and the directorate and assistant director level service delivery plans. As the plans are updated so is the PMF.

The measures and milestones that will demonstrate progress and the direction of travel of the Council over the coming years will be reported using scorecards and dashboards that will draw on the most recent published data from the Council's systems. This marks a shift away from written performance reports and waiting for performance information each quarter, enabling officers and members to explore progress and follow-up on issues with the senior officers, the relevant portfolio holder, and/or identify topics to be put forward for overview and scrutiny to look at.

This approach is expected to develop iteratively over the coming months and years, with the data becoming increasingly available, the access to the dashboards and scorecards becoming embedded, and their use becoming more regular. Further value will be added as members and officers become more confident in using them and taking account of other sources of data and intelligence from within the council and externally, such as national datasets.

7.3. Customer Services

The Council's Customer Service Centre (CSC) teams together support delivery of over 50 Council services and handle almost 300,000 contacts from Shropshire residents each year. These are via a number of different channels including telephone, E mail, webchat social media and face to face, through a successful and growing Shropshire Local service. The average response time on phone calls last year 3 mins 30 secs.

This service incorporates the First Point of Contact for our Adults and Children's Services and the Council's Local Welfare Fund to help families and individuals in need.

The recent addition of the CCTV monitoring team has meant the delivery of truly 24 hour contact services, allowing the Council to take back in-house out of hours emergency calls triaging, at the same time winning a contract to deliver this service for a public sector client.

Running alongside this is a very successful and cost-effective project to identify and provide digital upskilling for older residents which is changing the lives of those it helps and encouraging people to do more business online with the Council wherever possible. This initiative strongly supports the Digital First strategy and work within the Digital County programme, referred to in Section 5.

Our Customer Service Centre supports the Council by focussing on public contact where our Digital First approach does not yet provide a viable option.

Achievements in the last year include:

- Introduction of the Fix my Street application, with CSC central to the design, implementation and continuing development of this new

reporting tool which will make it easier for the public to digitally report over 100 Highways and Street Scene services.

- Supporting the ordering and distributing of the 3rd recycling bin where this was not completed online, and handling subsequent customer expectations.
- Handling other seasonal peaks in demand such as School Admissions, Elections and providing emergency contact and longer opening hours for residents affected by flooding in February 2022
- During the pandemic, acting as the single point of contact for many residents needing advice, financial help, emotional and health support as well as helping people to tap into practical support in their communities. More than 9,000 outbound calls were made to Shropshire's shielded residents to support and check on their welfare.
- Paying over £325,000 in Local Welfare Fund awards to support residents in financial hardship through the first year of Covid. Since then, through direct contact and through partnership working with a wide range of partner teams and organisations, Local Welfare have identified many Shropshire residents affected by the current financial crisis and awarded a £316,000 of support.
- The CSC also ran the Council's Covid support line and provided a vaccination call centre for the NHS that handling over 35,000 inbound and outbound calls.
- The growth of the Shropshire Local offer, which has added Ludlow alongside Shrewsbury as its contact points while a new mobile offer covering the county's main towns is now running. This team offer general help to residents while also showing them how they can access services digitally.
- Playing a key part in the council and partners' response to ensuring people have access to the right information and financial support to help them with the rising cost of living

For the future, the focus for Customer Services will be to support efforts to provide and promote our Digital first approach for our residents, helping to identify, develop and support improved front end solutions for all service areas.

By encouraging and increasing this shift to online as the preferred option for residents for many of our most requested services, advisors' efforts can focus on potentially high impact preventative outbound contacts leading to much better outcomes for the people contacted alongside more efficient services. Drawing on learning from Covid and the cost of living crisis and working with our Public Health and Data and Insight Teams, the service can proactively make contact with Shropshire's more vulnerable residents, supporting them with their wellbeing and identifying and helping them with any arising needs and issues often before these reach a point of crisis, so helping people to stay healthier and more independent for longer.

8. Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act Policy and Guidance

A review of the Council's Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act (RIPA) Policy and Guidance ('the Policy') has been undertaken with a revised Policy approved by Cabinet in January 2022.

Fundamentally, the Policy is about implementing appropriate checks and balances to ensure any surveillance activity undertaken by Council officers is compatible with the human right to privacy. At the same time, the Policy demonstrates that the Council accepts that surveillance is a necessary enforcement tool that is required to effectively deliver the Council's statutory and public duties that are aimed at protecting local communities from the adverse impact of crime and disorder, as well as inappropriate or fraudulent conduct within the Council itself. The Policy provides the basis upon which Council officers will undertake lawful surveillance activities. It also sets out that surveillance activities will continue to be reported to the Audit Committee and, where there are concerns, depending on the seriousness, escalated, as necessary, to Cabinet or full Council. In addition, for core RIPA surveillance, the Magistrates' Court, the Investigatory Powers Commissioner's Office (IPCO) and the Investigatory Powers Tribunal (IPT) provide external approval and oversight.

The Council may undertake covert surveillance through surveillance of individuals (but not in residential premises or private vehicles), by using undercover officers or informants, and by obtaining certain communications information (not the actual content) from telephone calls, emails, social media messages, letters, etc., and the Policy sets out how the Council will control the way in which these activities are authorised and undertaken.

The Policy sets out:

- how full and proper consideration will be given before, during and after any surveillance activity is undertaken;
- that surveillance must be necessary and proportionate;
- the principle that surveillance will only be undertaken if there is no other way to obtain the information/evidence that is sought; and
- that steps are taken to either avoid or minimise the private information that may be obtained about those who are not the subject of the surveillance

And also provides protection for the Council against potentially significant financial risks and reputational damage that may arise if:

- civil action is taken against the Council for acting in a way that is incompatible with an individual's human rights;
- criminal convictions of officers if communications data is obtained unlawfully;
- legal cases are undermined due to evidence being held inadmissible in court;
- service complaints are made to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman; and/or
- a judicial review is brought.

List of Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)

Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder)

Rob Gittins

Local Member

Appendices

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