Committee and Date	Item
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ICT & Digital Strategy

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1. Synopsis

Part of The Shropshire Plan, the Council has described a 'digital county'. This includes maximising digital and automated processes; supporting all residents and staff to benefit from this; and safeguarding and protecting the data and equipment needed to do this.

2. Executive Summary

2.1. The ICT and Digital Strategy (Appendix A) brings the previous strategy up to date and aligns with the objectives of The Shropshire Plan (agreed by Council in May 2022). It also takes the lessons we learnt from the pandemic about how the council can harness digital technology to enable quicker, safer, and more transparent communication with residents and local businesses.

2.2. Digital improvements and innovations are also a crucial element of the MTFS (elsewhere on this agenda), further enabling the delivery of the Shropshire Plan.

2.3. An infographic has been included (Appendix B). This infographic overlays the key strategic aims of the ICT and Digital Strategy over The Shropshire Plan and establishes clear links with the 4 healthy priorities.

2.4. The key elements of the ICT and Digital strategy are:

A. **Safeguard and Protect** - Ensure that the data the organisation holds, the software it operates, and the transactions it enters into are protected as effectively as possible against continually escalating cyber threats.

B. **Digitise and Automate** – Pursue and promote a 'digital county' in which as many transactions as possible are done through digitally enabled routes, while also accepting that some transactions and individuals will be better served in the traditional manner.

C. **Enable and Develop** – Encourage and support residents and council staff to develop their ability to use technology and to be comfortable doing so.

D. **Healthy People** – Working with the NHS and partners, digital technology will assist people throughout their lives, remotely monitoring their health, allowing participation in online consultations, enhancing data sharing and ultimately creating more personalised medical care. Having a better-connected county and a population that understands and is enabled to use digital technology will help people to remain healthy for longer, while remaining in their own homes.

E. **Healthy Environment** – Shropshire's natural beauty and strong green credentials give it a head start in this area, but the technology-enabled move to remote working has been a bonus in reducing road use and hence pollution. The continued move to cloud technologies will reduce energy use by the council and creating paperless transactions will reduce the impact on the environment.

F. **Healthy Organisation** – ICT and Digital technology is essential to any efficient organisation, and the improvements planned in this strategy will take council efficiency and the quality of the services it delivers to a new level. Digitising end-to-end services, ensuring the appropriate structure and skills to deliver quality and innovation, having a more digitally skilled workforce, making better use of data, and further adopting standards of good IT service delivery via the ITIL framework.

G. **Healthy Economy** – A strong local economy will depend on Shropshire being a well-connected county with digitally skilled workers. The council's work in improving connectivity, improving digital skills in the population, providing support to digital start-ups, and working to make the county an attractive place for high-tech businesses will play strongly into this agenda.

3.   Recommendations

3.1.   Cabinet and Council are recommended to adopt the ICT and Digital strategy (Appendix 1) and to endorse the core objectives of the digital county.

4. Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal

4.1. The digital strategy manages the risk that ICT investment and development is not aligned to the overall Council objectives set out in the Shropshire Plan.

4.2. The digital strategy also supports the delivery of those objectives within the constraints set out in the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS), promoting process efficiency and economy, and enabling the council to do more with less.

4.3. The digital strategy sets out key elements of the vision for use of ICT in the council and in the county in the coming years, harnessing the opportunities that this technology offers.

4.4. A critical consideration is that due regard is paid to the escalating threat of cyber-attack, and that all systems are effectively protected from this; also, that all system data is managed and safeguarded in line with best practice. The strategy helps set out how this will be achieved.

5. Financial Implications

5.1. Digital technology can save money, the Government Digital Service (GDS) reported saving central government £1.7Bn per year in 2015. It is important that we differentiate any savings between hours freed up to do other work, cost avoidance, efficiencies, and cashable savings.

5.2. No direct financial implications arise from this strategy. As actions and plans are implemented in line with the strategy these will be subject to separate decisions as necessary.

6. Climate Change Appraisal

6.1. Adopting a strategy to enable digital interactions as being the preferred (but not only) way for the council to do business will reduce the Council's carbon footprint and have several environmental benefits including but not limited to:

- Reducing paper usage through digital end-to-end services.
- Reducing travel and pollution by taking part in virtual meetings, accessing services and data remotely.
- Saving energy by utilising cloud services or using the Internet of Things (IoT) to monitor building usage, intelligently controlling the lights and heating.

The Strategy is not expected to have any direct implications for:
- Renewable energy generation
- Climate change adaptation

7. Background

7.1. Advances in technology over recent years have transformed how organisations in both the private and public sector deliver better services while also reducing their costs.

7.2. Technology is continually changing the way people go about their daily lives, how they interact, learn, play, and work, offering new and exciting opportunities for the way Shropshire Council connects and interacts with citizens and staff.

7.3. Technical progress is predicted to continue for years to come, and it allows Shropshire Council to help ensure that both citizens and visitors to the county enjoy the benefits of the digital age, while working to ensure that those in 'digitally poverty' are not left behind.

7.4. The ICT and Digital Strategy explores these technological advances, trends and opportunities while seeking to support the Council's strategic objectives by establishing clear links to the healthy priorities expressed in The Shropshire Plan.

7.5. It looks to pursuing and promoting a 'digital county' in which as many transactions as possible are done through digitally enabled routes, while also accepting that some transactions and individuals will be better served in the traditional manner.

7.6. Encouraging and supporting both residents and Council staff to develop their ability to use technology and to be comfortable doing so.

7.7. A challenge with implementing any type of digital service is digital inclusion, ensuring that citizens are not excluded or left behind. Our approach is to create compelling digital services, pursuing as many transactions as possible through digital routes. An important part of our approach is that traditional methods are not precluded as a potential delivery channel, ensuring that there are always non-digital means for citizens to interact with the council. We will promote and support existing council initiatives addressing digital exclusion including the bid to expand the digital skills programme and Shropshire Local. Our Shropshire Local customer service points offer a place for our citizens to talk to friendly council staff face to face and get support with a range of services, if citizens don't have a computer at home, they can use our public access computers.

7.8. Understanding that while technology can transform the way we live and work for the better, it's not without its risks. Cyber threats are very real and the damage they can cause can be devastating. It is vitally important that we ensure the confidentiality, integrity and availability of systems and data from both internal and external threats.

8.   Additional Information

8.1. There are three core elements in establishing organisational efficiency, people, process, and technology. People do the work; processes make this work more efficient, and technology helps people do their tasks and automate the processes. It is important to have a balanced relationship between the three elements for any efficiencies to be realised. We will be using the Getting Leadership Right program to help ensure the right leadership approach with our people and ensuring buy in across the organisation when introducing new technologies and processes as part of the strategy.

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

Local Member: All

Appendices

Appendix A ICT & Digital Strategy 2022-2025

Appendix B ICT & Digital Strategy Infographic