

# **CABINET**

**Meeting date: 23 July 2015**

**From: Corporate Director – Environment & Community Services**

## **DIGITAL STRATEGY**

### **1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- 1.1** *This paper presents Cabinet with a draft Digital Strategy for approval. (Appendix 1) The strategy sets out the County Council's ambition to develop electronic solutions that meet the needs and aspirations of the people of Cumbria. The strategy outlines the aspirations to move more transactional functions to an online platform and that the whole population can access the information and services in the most effective way.*
- 1.2** *The strategy is critical to the transformation of services across the organisation and in local areas. Implementation of this strategy is pivotal to the Council delivering value for money services and realising the efficiency savings it requires, whilst optimising the use of its ever reducing resources, exploiting the benefits of technology and supporting local growth. Greater use of technology underpins the levers of change required for the Council to continue to provide essential services efficiently and effectively while meeting the increasingly difficult financial challenge.*

### **2.0 STRATEGIC PLANNING AND EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS**

- 2.1** *The Council Plan 2014-17 sets out the Council's vision for Cumbria - for the people of Cumbria to benefit from sustainable economic growth and an enhanced quality of life. The Council will work within its available resources to protect the vulnerable, work with others in the community to shape services and help find solutions for the future. Essentially, this strategy supports all the Council priorities, but has particular congruence with Priority 8 'to be a modern efficient Council'.*

*The Council Plan Delivery Plan describes the action the Council will take to deliver the commitments set out in the Council Plan. The development of a Digital Strategy is an important move forward which will help the Council to transform its services to be a modern and efficient council and to deliver efficiency savings by reducing the cost of service delivery.*

**2.2 Over the next three years the Council's digital priorities will be:**

- **To ensure that the council is using digital technology to its best effect to support economic growth, learning and education and provide support for the most vulnerable to ensure health and wellbeing**
- **To transform services, reduce cost and support improvement in outcomes through the provision of more online transactions and different models of service delivery in response to customer demand and feedback**
- **To support digital inclusion and access – enabling people to get online and access services for themselves**
- **To maximise the potential of digital technology in communicating and engaging with the public, customers and partner organisations**

**2.3 By 2017/18 implementation of the strategy will have:**

- **Enabled people to access services in a way that utilises digital technology;**
- **Supported people who want to get online to do so**
- **Facilitated the transformation of services by using digital technology**
- **Used digital technology to support the delivery of better outcomes for Cumbria**

**3.0 RECOMMENDATION**

**3.1 Cabinet is recommended to approve the Digital Strategy 2015-2018**

**ADVICE OF CORPORATE DIRECTOR – ENVIRONMENT & COMMUNITY SERVICES**

**4.0 BACKGROUND**

4.1 There are many challenges facing Local Government at present, arising from the changing needs of citizens and communities within Cumbria. The current global economic pressures and the extended period of austerity measure both at a national and local level is presenting financial challenges for all councils. The Council have already made savings of £80 million in the previous 3 years and have a further £83 million savings are required by 2018.

- 4.2 The strategy describes the current picture of digital access and usage in Cumbria along with the current way in which the Council uses technology of this type to support the delivery of outcomes the Council is seeking to achieve. The strategy also sets out our priorities for further investment and the actions the Council will commit to over the next three years in order to respond to these challenges.
- 4.3 The council already have a number of digital services available including online school admission applications, the provision of electronic libraries services, various online transactions, booking an appointment to register birth/death, request a copy of certificate online, apply online for blue badges etc. However, these services have evolved often independently but the benefits available through greater use of digital technologies can be better addressed through the establishment of a cross-cutting strategy.
- 4.4 One of the main purposes of this, the first ever Digital Strategy for the Council, is to drive down the cost of both internal processes and customer interaction. National benchmarking shows the cost of digital transactions to be up to 30 times less than face-to-face meetings and significantly less than phone and post. The Strategy and Delivery Plan are therefore predicated on a “digital by default” approach which, in our context can be summarised as **“clicks, not bricks”** and which steers users to self-service wherever possible.
- 4.5 Externally while this approach is reflected in our digital offer to service users the strategy also incorporates activities to support digital inclusion and access as the Council recognises that not everyone has access or the ability to use ICT. This priority recognises that digital inclusion can enhance lives, support community cohesion and improve equality of opportunity. The Council is currently working closely with Go ON North West (the UK’s Digital Skills Alliance) to inspire and support people and organisations that want to share their digital skills with others. As more and more services are now increasing their focus on online channels, it’s more important than ever that people living in Cumbria have knowledge of using digital services.
- 4.6 In delivering the Strategy, we will support customers to access and understand our digital offer, providing clear, accessible and user-friendly technology which helps meet customer needs at a time which suits them without being restricted to more traditional “office hours”. This could range from the provision of library services, to payment of car parking fines through to ordering of adaptive aids for older adults or people with disabilities.
- 4.7 Indeed, many of those who are currently digitally excluded are those who could benefit most:
- older people can often be supported in their own homes for longer if they have access to home shopping and can communicate with family, friends and support services online
  - web access can open up education and employment opportunities for low-income families and those seeking work

- rural isolation can be reduced by access to online services.
  - travel reduction for people when accessing online rather than having to travel
  - long term health conditions can be monitored from home through technology like Telehealth where the use of such technology supports the Council priority to help vulnerable people to live healthy and independent lives
- 4.8 It should also be noted that access to many state provided benefits, including the introduction of Universal Credit are expected to be increasingly through on-line processes. It is therefore essential that we recognise the digital needs of those most vulnerable in society and this Strategy recognises the importance of digital inclusion and access for a whole range of public services.
- 4.9 The Council is committed to having a digital infrastructure in place, through the Connecting Cumbria project. The Connecting Cumbria programme will continue to increase the number of premises with publically funded fibre broadband to 120,000 by the end of 2015. 93% of premises in Cumbria are targeted to have access to superfast broadband, with the remainder of the county's premises having access to a minimum 2mbps internet connections. There will be connectivity so that every house and business in Cumbria has a choice of Internet Service Provider (ISP) and the cost to the consumer is no higher than for a similar level of service elsewhere in the country. Phase 2 of Connecting Cumbria (currently in procurement) aims to provide superfast broadband to a further 2% of premises meaning that 95% of premises in Cumbria are targeted to have access to superfast broadband by the end of 2017.
- 4.10 Modern Public Services are increasingly shifting delivery where possible to an online service model, to reduce costs and improve services. Making public services as simple to access and as automated as possible can speed up transactions, empower staff and reduce costs. Tailoring public services where possible allows scarce resources to be used where necessary on face-to-face services, where electronic services will only ever complement delivery. Thus supporting the Government Digital Strategy which sets out how the government will redesign its digital services to make them so straightforward and convenient that all those who can use them prefer to do so, support those who aren't online, build digital capability across government and use digital to improve policy making.
- 4.11 Internet usage is rapidly growing and the demand for online services is also growing. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) began publishing quarterly data on Internet users and non-users aged 16 and over in March 2011, having added the question 'when did you last use the Internet?' to the quarterly Labour Force Survey. The latest ONS statistics estimate that 44.6 million adults in the UK (87%) had used the Internet in Q1 2014 (January to March); up from 82% in Q1 2011. ONS statistics show that Internet usage is strongly linked to age. In Q1 2014, 99% of adults in the two youngest age groups (16-24 years and 25-34 years) had used the Internet, compared to

just 37% of adults aged 75+. However, the proportion of older adults using the Internet has increased substantially since Q1 2011. ONS statistics also identify that adults with a disability and adults with lower earnings are less likely to have used the Internet.

- 4.12 At a local level, ONS statistics estimate that 87% of adults in Cumbria had used the Internet in Q1 2014; up from 79% in Q1 2011.
- 4.13 The council are already committed to having fit for purpose modern buildings. The digital strategy will complement the services provided from an area perspective by offering better self-service solutions for the public enabling the council to make the best use of its resources, with the potential of providing customer self-service points in the main council buildings and provision of free public Wi-Fi in, for example, Cumbria Care establishments.
- 4.14 As a result of the strategy we will continue to enable citizens to achieve greater autonomy through the use of self-service technology and thus help manage demand for public services and in turn realise financial savings. We will use digital technology, data and knowledge to its best effect to support economic growth, learning and education, support for the most vulnerable, health and wellness and enable people to get online and access service themselves.
- 4.15 Underpinning the development and implementation of this Digital Strategy is a clear recognition that the use of digital technology is more cost-effective than traditional communication and delivery methods and will therefore be used to reduce our transactional costs and release savings. Implicit in the strategy is an approach which seeks to embed user self-service and “digital by default” wherever possible. Benchmarking has shown savings of circa £1.5m per year to be possible for a mid-sized Council in fully adopting a digital by default approach. Implementing the actions outlines in this Strategy supports the reshaping of Council services in order to realise savings included in the Medium Term Financial Plan.
- 4.16 The main vehicle mechanism for delivery of the Digital Strategy will see the development of a Service Centre. While currently the Service Centre has evolved from the HR service where its role is predominately in relation to supporting staff with HR queries and transacting payroll services, in future the Service Centre will be a key interface between internal and external customers. Responsible for the management and delivery of transaction based activities across the Council and county ensuring resources within service areas can focus on the delivery of core services to the people of Cumbria.
- 4.17 The Service Centre will be a primary contributor to delivering the corporate priority of a modern and efficient Council. The focus of the service will be putting the customer first with first time resolution at the core of delivery. Effective digital channels will enable customers to self-serve solutions which will contribute to a reduced cost of delivery.

- 4.18 In addition to providing the relevant technologies to all customers it is essential that the Service Centre has a robust technical infrastructure along with the relevant tools to support first time resolution for customers along with a Customer Relationship Management system at its core. The need to understand our customers and their service requirements is essential data that will support the Council to deliver services that meet the changing needs of the people of Cumbria.
- 4.19 Increased implementation of self service for customers combined with a redesign of business processes as they transition into the Service Centre will drive financial and non- financial efficiencies. Of course, technology itself will not generate the expected level of savings. Behavioural change is essential if we are to drive down transactional costs and successfully implementing the Digital Strategy will require an approach which sees customers being encouraged to utilise the digital offer.
- 4.20 The cost of the technology and resource requirements to establish the Service Centre will be funded through a combination of Efficiency and Investment Reserve and the ICT Development fund. The importance of this Strategy, both in terms of the customer journey and the realisation of efficiency savings, will be reflected in its governance with a dedicated Programme Board tasked with overseeing its delivery.

## **5.0 OPTIONS**

- 5.1 Cabinet can approve the attached Corporate Digital Strategy 2015-2018
- 5.2 Cabinet can amend the attached Corporate Digital Strategy 2015-2018
- 5.3 Cabinet can reject the attached Corporate Digital Strategy 2015-2018.

## **6.0 RESOURCE AND VALUE FOR MONEY IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 The purpose of this report is for Cabinet to approve the Corporate Digital Strategy 2015-18. The Strategy will help support the delivery of the Council's priorities and will be pivotal to a number of service delivery transformations across the County which will see the Council deliver some of its services through online platforms.
- 6.2 Whilst there are no direct resource and value for money implications in approving the Strategy; in February 2015 Council approved a budget of £1.000m for ICT improvements as part of the Capital programme for 2015-16
- 6.3 Furthermore within the MTFP 2015-18 approved by Council there are a number of savings that are to be delivered through the increased and effective use of digital technology.
- 6.4 In delivering the strategy, the Council's aspiration to move more transactional functions to an online platform should result in a reduction in the cost of delivering services. This should enable the Council to provide services that are value for money.

## 7.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 The approval of a Digital Strategy is a decision for the Cabinet. Implementation of the strategy will give rise to legal considerations but there are no specific legal implications to approving the strategy.

## 8.0 CONCLUSION

- 8.1 The Digital Strategy 2015-18 sets out the County Council's ambition to develop electronic solutions that meet the needs and aspirations of the people of Cumbria. It recognises the need to introduce schemes to ensure more people have access to the internet and are equipped with the skills needed in a digital age. The strategy outlines the aspirations to move more transactional functions to an online platform, and that the whole population can access the information and services in the most effective ways.

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**Corporate Director - Environment & Community Services**

July 2015

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## APPENDICES

**Appendix 1 – Digital Strategy**  
**Appendix 2 – Evidence**  
**Appendix 3 – Equality Impact Assessment**

Electoral Division(s): All

*\* Please remove whichever option is not applicable*

Executive Decision	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes*	<input type="checkbox"/>
Key Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> No*
If a Key Decision, is the proposal published in the current Forward Plan?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> N/A*
Is the decision exempt from call-in on grounds of urgency?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> No*
If exempt from call-in, has the agreement of the Chair of the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee been sought or obtained?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> N/A*
Has this matter been considered by Overview and Scrutiny? Digital Task and Finish Group now established.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes*	<input type="checkbox"/>
Has an environmental or sustainability impact assessment been undertaken?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> N/A*

Has an equality impact assessment been undertaken?

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**PREVIOUS RELEVANT COUNCIL OR EXECUTIVE DECISIONS**  
*[including Local Committees]*

*No previous relevant decisions.*

**CONSIDERATION BY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY**

*SMB have established a Digital Task & Finish Group which is scheduled to report in September*

**BACKGROUND PAPERS**

*No background papers*

**RESPONSIBLE CABINET MEMBER**

**Cllr Barry Doughty: Cabinet Member for Fire, Public Safety and Central Support Services**

**REPORT AUTHOR**

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