

Digital Strategy Update 2019

Final Decision-Maker	[POLICY AND RESOURCES]
Lead Head of Service	Georgia Hawkes
Lead Officer and Report Author	Gary Hunter
Classification	Public
Wards affected	All

Executive Summary

In April 2018 the Council adopted a new 3 year Digital Strategy. The strategy focusses on delivering improvements for residents, businesses and staff through six key themes; Digital Customer, Place, Design, Workforce, Infrastructure and Data. Good progress has been made and this report provides an update on the progress made within those key themes and provides an updated delivery action plan for 2019-21.

Purpose of Report

To note the progress made in delivering the Digital Strategy in 2018/19 and agree the updated delivery action plan for 2019-21.

This report makes the following recommendations to this Committee:

1. Note the progress made in the first year of the delivering the Digital Strategy
2. Agree the revised action plan for 2019-21

Timetable

Meeting	Date
CLT	2 July 2019
Policy & Resources Committee	18 September 2019

Digital Strategy Update 2019

1. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
Impact on Corporate Priorities	We do not expect the recommendations will by themselves directly affect achievement of corporate priorities. However, actions contained within the strategies action plan will support the Council's overall achievement of its priorities.	Transformation & Digital Services Manager
Cross Cutting Objectives	The report recommendation supports the achievement of the Council's cross cutting objectives (e.g. the creation of the "Go Green, Go Wild" website will help to ensure that "Biodiversity and Environmental Sustainability is respected").	Transformation & Digital Services Manager
Risk Management	See section 3 below.	Transformation & Digital Services Manager
Financial	The proposals set out in the recommendation are all within already approved budgetary headings and so need no new funding for implementation.	[Section 151 Officer & Finance Team]
Staffing	This report has no direct staffing implications.	Transformation & Digital Services Manager
Legal	No specific legal implications are identified. Under Section 3 of the Local Government Act 1999 local authorities have a duty to "make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness". The Council's Digital Strategy demonstrates compliance with the statutory duty. The Policy and Resources Committee is responsible for all policy matters not otherwise allocated to any other committee or to Council as part of the policy framework. As such it is for the Policy and Resources Committee to note the progress made in the delivering the Digital Strategy and to approve the revised action plan for 2019-21.	Team Leader (Corporate Governance), MKLS

Privacy and Data Protection	Any data held or processed in connection with the updated strategy action plan will be done so in line with policies and retention schedules.	Policy and Information Team
Equalities	We recognise the actions within the strategy action plan may have varying impacts on different communities within Maidstone. Separate equalities impact assessments will be completed for the individual projects or actions contained within the strategy action plan.	Equalities and Corporate Policy Officer
Public Health	The recommendations will not have a direct impact on population health or that of individuals.	[Public Health Officer]
Crime and Disorder	The recommendation will not have an impact on Crime and Disorder.	Transformation & Digital Services Manager
Procurement	Some of the actions within the strategy may require procurement. We will complete those exercises in line with financial procedure rules.	Transformation & Digital Services Manager

2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1 In April 2018 the Council adopted a new Digital Strategy. The 2018-21 strategy focusses on delivering improvements for residents, businesses and staff through six key themes:

1. Digital customer
2. Digital place
3. Digital by design
4. Digital workforce
5. Digital infrastructure
6. Data for digital

1.1.1 A table showing progress made against the original Digital Strategy delivery action plan and other relevant improvements that have been delivered since April 2018 is included at Appendix A.

1.1.2 During the first year of the strategy the volume of digital contact continued to increase, with more than 1 million visits to the Council's website. When comparing online contact, face to face visits, calls handled by the contact centre and post received, the proportion of online contact increased from 34.3% in 2017/18 to 41.32% in 2018/19 and is now the most popular contact channel. Some of the most popular online transactions include:

- 91.6% of parking permit applications online
- 91.2% of abandoned vehicles reports online
- 80.4% of missed bin reports online
- 80% of bulky collection bookings online

1.1.3 In the first year of the strategy we have focussed on creating the right environment to enable the delivery of the strategy objectives, through changes in culture and technology and improving the way we work to design better digital services. Our approach to service delivery is:

- **Focus on meeting user needs** - Every piece of work we do is based upon meeting a need that our residents, businesses, visitors or staff have, which helps us to build the right thing. We do this by speaking directly to our users and observing how they interact with our services, basing all our design decisions on evidence and insights gained through user research and analytics.
- **Continuously improve our services** – We recognise there are always improvements that can be made, and this concept has been built into the way we work, putting working products into the hands of staff or residents early so we can test how well they work, providing us with the insight needed to continuously improve them over time.

1.1.4 The following section provides a more in-depth overview of key issues important to the delivery of the strategy under each of the six themes of the Digital Strategy.

1.2 **Digital Customer** - *Reducing digital exclusion by providing digital skills and access to digital services for all residents of the borough*

1.2.1 As part of this theme, Maidstone Borough Council has started a Digital Inclusion network with other organisations including Kent County Council, the Department for Work and Pensions, Golding Homes, Citizens Advice Bureau and Involve, and have agreed to work together to coordinate digital skills support for residents in Maidstone. The group have gathered details of digital access points and support providers in the areas and are carrying out a survey of residents who seek support from the partner organisations to form a local picture of digital capability. The outcome of this work will inform the direction of Maidstone's digital inclusion strategy, which is due to be completed later this year.

1.2.2 Recognising that some residents will always need support, the Customer Service team has been restructured to create a dedicated team to support residents with digital transactions. This new team will deal exclusively with residents who contact the council about transactions that have been or could be carried out online and will support those residents who were unable to carry out the online transaction themselves.

1.3 **Digital Place** - *The Council will support where necessary the provision of fast and effective digital infrastructure for residents, businesses and*

visitors, and will exploit digital technology to make the borough a better place.

- 1.3.1 We have continued to work with Kent County Council (KCC) to, where possible, influence the improvement in broadband coverage within the borough of Maidstone, through KCC's Making Kent Quicker project.
- 1.3.2 Overall Maidstone has roughly 96.5% coverage above Superfast levels (25Mbps) and Ofcom reports that the percentage of properties unable to receive decent broadband (10 Mbps) in the Borough reduced to 2.6% in January 2019, down from 4.14% in January 2018. The percentage of properties unable to receive basic broadband speeds of 2 Mbps reduced from 0.73% to just under 0.4%.
- 1.3.3 Work is planned to reduce further the small percentages of Maidstone residents and businesses who cannot access decent or basic broadband. KCC is in the final stages of extending their Broadband Delivery UK (BDUK) contract to deliver another £5 million worth of broadband with BT and have activity proposed improvements in Boxley, Dean Street, Kettle Corner, Hunton, Otham, Harrietsham, Lenham, Sutton Valence, Langley, Wateringbury, Mereworth and Nettlestead.
- 1.3.4 Officers are also in discussion with Virgin Media about their expansion plans in the borough at Allington and Cripple Street and are seeking opportunities to improve on and expand the footprint of Call Flow services in the locality, primarily related to their existing network in Yalding and Collier Street.
- 2.3.1 There are two additional schemes to reach areas without superfast broadband currently live with the Government: The Gigabit Voucher Scheme (GVS) and the Rural Gigabit Connectivity Scheme (RGC). KCC is proposing to add further funding to residential properties in the RGC scheme by topping up the available £1,500 by another £1,000 to make the full funding available under that scheme. KCC is also working with communities on developing Voucher funded schemes in Sutton Valence, Hollingbourne, Hucking, Stockbury, Staplehurst and Marden
- 2.4 **Digital by Design** - *Embracing digital technology to enable council services to be delivered online with the capability to meet the future needs of the authority, with digital services designed in such a way that customers choose to use them as a default, whilst still supporting those who are not yet capable of doing so.*
 - 2.4.1 In line with our design principles the team have engaged with more than 2000 residents, through surveys, focus groups, telephone and face to face interviews to ensure that the digital services that are designed meet resident's needs. All new services are assessed against the new government service standard to ensure digital transactions are accessible, safe and secure, meet data security standards and above all have been designed to meet user needs.
 - 2.4.2 A new 'My Maidstone' customer platform will be launched on 1 November 2019. 'My Maidstone' will provide an enhanced online experience for

residents who contact the council through the website and will eventually tie together all customer contact, provide personalised information and improve the submission and tracking of service requests for residents.

2.5 Digital Workforce - *Building a culture that embeds digital ways of working at all levels of our organisation, in order to build our digital capability and create a digital workforce which is agile, mobile and using the most appropriate technologies to support service delivery.*

2.5.1 As part of the development of this theme, all departments are now required to consider potential digital enhancements to their service provision as part of the service planning process and new digital take up performance indicators will, in future help track how successful departments are in providing digital alternatives for residents and businesses.

2.5.2 A 'new ways of working' programme is in progress, which brings together a range of activities to reduce paper usage, storage requirements and improve the use of technology to benefit staff and customers. Changes as a result include:

- Corporate and Wider Leadership Teams using the Council's report management ICT system to progress towards paperless meetings
- The creation of new flexible informal meeting space on the 5th floor of Maidstone House.
- A plan to enhance the technology in some of the Council's meeting rooms to support the use of Skype for conference calling and reduce the need for travel to other offices
- The planned rollout of Skype for Business to Members

2.6 Digital Infrastructure - *Ensuring we harness new and emerging technologies to support the redesign services in a way which meets the changing expectations of staff, residents and businesses.*

2.6.1 To support this theme, we have put in place a new purchasing guide and governance framework to ensure all changes to technology across the council are fit-for purpose, accessible, cost-effective, secure and in line with the Council's vision for digital transformation.

2.6.2 As part of the exploration of new and cost-effective technology a new service to inform residents of changes to bin collections via text message was introduced in November 2018. The service has been very popular, with more than 5500 residents currently subscribed. The service is now embedded within the waste team and being used daily to keep residents informed of issues with bin collections, ultimately reducing demand on the customer service team. The technology is now being expanded to other services including payment reminders for Council Tax.

2.6.3 The Corporate Support and Transformation and Digital Services teams are currently implementing a project to explore the potential of Robotic Process Automation in handling the receipt and routing of photographic evidence. If successful, this will free up significant staff time from dealing with simple repetitive tasks.

2.7 Data for Digital - *Making better use of data and making data more accessible to residents through online council channels, increasing accessibility and transparency.*

2.7.1 A new Customer Relationship Management system (CRM) has been installed, which along with the new 'My Maidstone' customer account will enable a better view of customer contact and data from all over the council and will ultimately facilitate a move to having a single view of customer and property data in the future, and remove the need for customers to report changes that impact different departments more than once.

2.7.2 Core Council property-based databases, including Council Tax and Electoral Services have been aligned using the same unique property reference number (UPRN) to allow better data matching between departments, which in turn will streamline internal processes and improve services to residents.

2.7.3 Funded through the Business Rates retention scheme, the Housing department is currently working with Earnest and Young to deliver a One View tool which brings together unshared data from across the council and partner organisations, to provide a single view of a household, to support a better-informed assessment process. Using a predictive analytics model One View will help identify factors that put people at risk of becoming homeless. This earlier identification will enable us to provide targeted support and intervention to help us prevent homelessness crises as well as helping to manage demand

3. AVAILABLE OPTIONS

3.1 Option 1: The Council does not need to deliver all the actions listed in the updated action plan; however, this may reduce the planned benefits of the digital strategy; or

3.2 Option 2: The revision to the digital strategy action plan is agreed.

4. PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 The preferred option is Option 2, as the action plan is necessary to deliver the benefits of the digital strategy

5. RISK

5.1 The risks associated with this report, have been considered in line with the Council's Risk Management Framework. We are satisfied that the risks associated are within the Council's risk appetite and will be managed as per the Policy.

6. REPORT APPENDICES

- *Appendix A: [Update on 2018/19 Digital Strategy action plan]*
 - *Appendix B: [Updated action plan for 2019/21]*
-