Borough of Telford and Wrekin

Cabinet

13 October 2022

Digital Strategy Update 2022

Cabinet Member:	Cllr Rae Evans - Cabinet Member: Finance, Governance and Customer Services Lead Director:
Lead Director:	Felicity Mercer - Director: Communities, Customer and Commercial Services
Service Area:	Information and Digital Technology (IDT)
Report Author:	Kirsty King – Service Delivery Manager for IDT
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Wards Affected:	Borough-wide impact
Key Decision:	Not Key Decision
Forward Plan:	N/A
Report considered by:	SMT – 20 September 2022
	Business Briefing - 29 September 2022

1.0   Recommendations for decision/noting:

It is recommended that Cabinet:-

1.1   Approves the update to the Digital Strategy, noting the progress delivered to date and endorses the refreshed action plan, as set out in **Appendix A**.

1.2   Grants delegated authority to the Director: Communities, Customer and Commercial Services in consultation with the Cabinet Member: Finance, Governance and Customer Services to take the necessary steps to implement the actions contained in Appendix A.

2.0   Purpose of Report

2.1   The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the Digital Strategy, including actions delivered since its launch.

3.0   Background

3.1   The strategy was originally approved by Cabinet on 10 June 2021. The strategy set our vision, which is to:-

Create a better borough through digital innovation, providing seamless connectivity for all and encouraging more take-up of information and services online.

The strategy is divided into 4 themes:

- digital customers;
- digital communities;
- digital place;
- digital workforce.

3.2   The strategy highlighted the initial actions planned, to deliver our aims through to the end of 2023/2024. Cabinet agreed that the strategy would be reviewed annually, with progress being reported to members.

4.0   Summary of main proposals

4.1   In summary, the digital strategy is progressing well. Of the 37 actions we were aiming to deliver in 2021/22, 15 have been completed. In addition, a further 2 actions allocated to future years (2022/23 and 2023/24) have been completed ahead of schedule, with a further 17 in progress. Updates on those actions which have not yet been completed are highlighted in **Appendix A** - Digital Strategy Tracker 2022.

4.2   The Digital Strategy is a council wide programme of work with numerous teams working together to achieve excellent progress in driving digital forward. Some examples of excellent progress made in each of the 4 themes is set out below:-
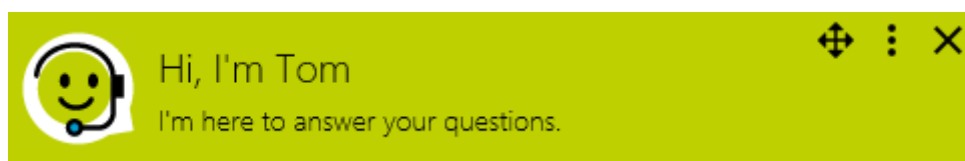
4.3   Digital Customers

Encouraged the Chatbot service to be the initial point of customer contact and increased the number of questions the Chatbot can answer

The launch of Tom the Chatbot has been a huge success with 12,530 queries answered since go live and 98.5% customer satisfaction. This service is available 24/7 with 33% of questions answered out of normal office hours. Since go live, we have also launched new question sets for Leisure and the Theatre with Tom located on Leisure websites including Ice Rink and Town Park.

We have seen a 29.5% increase in queries Q1 22/23 compared with Q4 21/22

Next steps in developing Tom further are adding School Admissions to help with spikes of contact at school application and decision time, Passenger Transport/Dial a Ride.

Explored new channels in order to communicate with new audiences

The council now uses NextDoor to target community minded residents down to neighbourhood level at no cost. The use and performance of the council's Instagram account has been reviewed and engagement rates have improved considerably by an increase is 15.5%. A new TikTok account has been launched and is being tested, we are averaging around 800 views per video and 86 followers.

4.4   Digital Communities

Supported the digitally excluded

Funding has been allocated to a digital inclusion project, which has enabled existing schemes to expand and new schemes to be developed, working with a range of partners, including Age UK, Stay, Hub on the Hill, CVS and PODS. A new digital directory has been created, providing a one-stop shop to help people get online e.g. how to access PCs, free Wi-Fi, training etc. In addition, 64 devices have been provided to a range of partners to support local groups/projects, including homework clubs, wellbeing cafes and tea and tech training sessions. A further 50 devices have been purchased for a new library lending scheme, with a pilot launching at Southwater library at the end of July 2022.

We are also collaborating with NHS and Shropshire Council to identify potential projects we can work together on relating to the Digital inclusion theme.
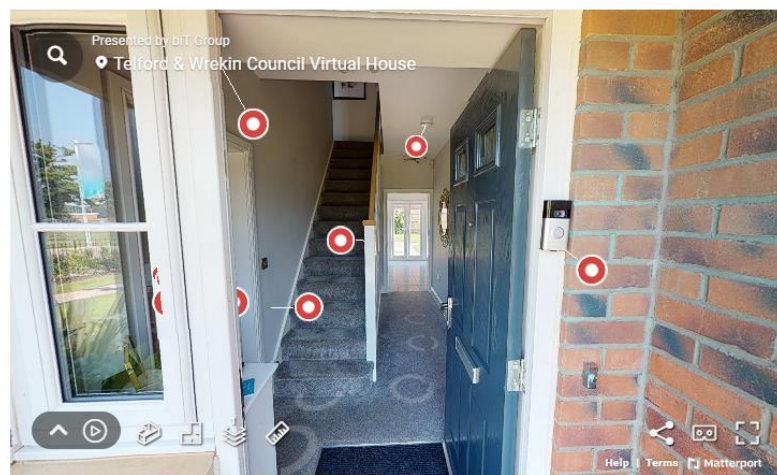
Feedback provided from PODS for the 8 iPads provided from Digital Inclusion Funding – "The iPads have enabled us to deliver varying sessions, the most popular being Minecraft club and coding club. The sessions have allowed children and young adults to come together in a supported environment, resulting in

improved engagement with their peers and reduced isolation, alongside developing their skills, knowledge and confidence using IT and digital devices. The parents/carers have also reported that they have found the sessions beneficial, by allowing the children to calm and refresh after the strains and stresses of a day at school, it has also allowed the parents to have a coffee and chat to each other resulting in improved well-being".

Introduced a Virtual House

This is now complete and fully accessible via Live Well Telford: Virtual House tour - Virtual House tour - Telford & Wrekin Council. Residents can take an interactive tour of the house to see examples of assistive technology and sensory aids and equipment that help with daily activities around the home.
This facility has had 4,212 visits in last 6 months and1,671 visits last month.
With the following feedback received "I have completed a tour of the house and have noted three items which I will purchase. The virtual tour is an excellent idea - I found it informative and easy to navigate".

4.5   Digital Place

Continue to deliver Pride In Our High Street

The new range of Pride in Our High Street grants was launched in January 2022.The digital grant ranges from £250 - £1,000 and to date there have been 18 grants awarded. The grant is to enable a business to trade in the digital arena including on line selling, enabling a business to trade with a laptop or online payment system or website development. This can include the costs of licences and hosting costs for a period of up to 3 years. Examples include:

Little Green Pantry eco shop in Wellington - £750 towards website design and initial hosting and maintenance costs – to support on-line sales/click and collect service
Moonshine & Fuggles specialist artisan distillery products Ironbridge - £999 towards the cost of a new sales management system to include inventory management, stock control, on-line ordering.

The Walnut restaurant has been boosted with a £1,000 digital grant to make its website more user-friendly and to implement an online table booking service to attract more customers through the door.

Meanwhile Seaton Sports are using a £1,000 grant to create a new website with an online shopping cart and other built in features to help the business integrate its shop till system with online sales.

Owner David Seaton said: "It's really important to have an online presence these days to broaden your customer base.

"This digital grant is helping us to develop our website and align the sales side of our business better. "We're really grateful for this financial support so we can add more functionality to our website and develop and expand our online service."

We continue to promote mytlc and a 'how to use video' will shortly be released which will help businesses understand how to use offers to boost sales. A PR campaign is about to start targeted at users.

Deliver full fibre infrastructure capable of supporting 5G to realise the potential of 'Gigabit Telford'

This is on target, with the procurement phase complete and site surveys commenced. We have partnered with Virgin Media O2 Business to deliver a 10-year, multimillion-pound boost to digital infrastructure, employment and skills in the area. The partnership includes a major upgrade programme to connect more than 200 local council and public buildings to an ultrafast full fibre network which will provide increased resilience and much faster speeds, in some areas the speed increase could be more than triple the speed they are able to get now.

This new infrastructure will also open up the potential for 12,000 other properties in Telford & Wrekin to connect to the Virgin Media O2 fixed network in the future

Virgin Media O2 Business is investing in a series of local social impact initiatives through the partnership to help tackle digital exclusion, support Care Leavers and boost employment. Some examples include:

- Upskilling through work placements for schools and colleges, to support Telford and Wrekin's young people, particularly those in more socioeconomically deprived areas, VMB will provide the following social benefit offer of up to 30 x 2-week work placements with VMB Telford Network Assurance team.

- Commitments to improve skills and access to digital technology through providing in-kind connectivity to Telford and Wrekin's voluntary, community, and social enterprise (VCSE) sector Superfast business broadband connectivity to 10 x third sector and/or council-owned premises. These premises may include charities, foodbanks, or council-owned community centres/hubs and sheltered/temporary accommodation schemes operating in Telford and Wrekin.

- Technology fund valued at £30,000 to improve access to digital

- Local Care Leavers offer, VMB will provide the Council with £10,000 in-kind donation to support Care Leavers in Telford and Wrekin.

4.6   Digital Workforce

Invest further in business intelligence

Significant investment has been made in Power BI to enable greater accessibility and visualisation of data to support evidence based decision making. This includes moving to a Premium licencing model and introducing many new dashboards across the authority to make data more accessible to staff. Data

models and new processes have been introduced to create more efficiencies in the processing of data for reporting purposes. Plans for the coming 12 months include launching a new 'facts and figures' website with Power BI interactivity, detailed and interactive Census dashboards that our residents can view and a number of performance and activity dashboards to be implemented across the Council and for partnerships.

Continue to adopt technology solutions in place of traditional functions

IDT continue to communicate with key stakeholders throughout business areas of the Council to advertise new and available apps and solutions that could assist them to achieve greater efficiency, accuracy and output; various conversations between IDT and business areas take place regularly, and both sides are focused on outcomes bringing about improvements, reducing existing costs, and better serving the workforce and residents of the borough.

We are now receiving regular requests from Council teams that want to transition away from traditional methods of working and IT use, in favour of modern and cloud-based methods. In support of this, IDT have assisted various teams to begin to retire their network drives, replacing them with Microsoft Teams, SharePoint, OneDrive, and the latest version of Office to carry out work and collaborate with both internal and external colleagues; recent areas include teams within Audit, Children's Services, Events, and Housing, and only positive feedback has been received so far.

Since March 2020, the demand for hybrid meeting solutions has risen exponentially throughout Telford & Wrekin Council, and many business areas have unique technical requirements for their meetings and events. IDT have supported the Council at both high and local levels to consult on available technology and solutions to enable its workforce to meet and work flexibly, and in 2022, hybrid meeting solutions have begun to be purchased, installed, and used in various areas of the Council; further purchases and installs will continue throughout 2022 and 2023.

In addition to the actions already included in the Digital Strategy, we seek approval for these additional items to be added within the following themes:

4.7   **Digital Communities**

Digital Switchover

By 2025, analogue telephone services will be switched off as the UK's telecoms infrastructure is upgraded to digital connectivity. This shift has implications for the digital care technology sector and the people who rely on telecare in Telford and Wrekin, particularly those known to Adult Social Care.

The transition has begun already with many telecom exchanges having converted over to fully digital. From 2023 BT will no longer sell analogue devices. Adult Social Care is planning now to ensure that telecare and social alarm service

reliability and safety is not compromised, and that vulnerable people are not impacted.

The switchover presents both challenges and opportunities; for example, digital services and equipment are likely to cost more than analogue, which could have a significant impact upon budgets. However, there is also the chance to transform services which could potentially improve services."

4.8   Digital Place

Replacement Gazetteer Management System

As part of the replacement planning and building control software the Council has scoped an innovative way of handling addresses of new build from pre-application planning stage all the way through to street naming via a capable Gazetteer Management System (GMS). We will be the first authority in the country to do this.

The replacement GMS will also consume a new interface from Ordnance Survey that will deliver live OS mapping. It will enable new addresses to be made into a live status a lot more quickly benefiting new residents to register to vote, register for council tax, order new bins and apply for school placement more quickly as a result of improved data processes. The live API will also enable improved accuracies around Basic Land Property Unit (BLPU) points within the Ordnance Survey Mastermap building TOID, which is a national standard for compliance.

The project mandate prepared confirmed the project accords with the principles of both the Council and government's vision for a digital marketplace and will be awarded in 2022 for delivery in 2023.

5.0   Alternative Options

5.1   The alternative is to do nothing, however this is not recommended because it would prevent us from delivering our aim.

6.0   Key Risks

6.1   Given the current economic climate and funding challenges facing local government, the requirement to deliver savings could impact upon delivery of the strategy. We are currently resourced to deliver the strategy and any decisions to make changes to team resources would be considered in the usual way and would follow a period of consultation.

7.0   Council Priorities

7.1   The proposed Digital Strategy supports all Council priorities, and in particular a community- focussed, innovative Council providing efficient, effective and quality services.

The key outcome of the strategy is to create a better borough through digital innovation, providing seamless connectivity for all and encouraging more take-up of information and services online.

8.0   Financial Implications

8.1   The capital programme 2021/22 to 2025/26 includes an approved allocation of £3.47m to support the Councils' Digital Strategy.

In addition to the capital programme, specific revenue reserve has been identified to fund the Digital Inclusion project in 2022/23 and 2023/24.

Not all of the items in the Digital Strategy are funded. Costs are currently being firmed up and will be considered as part of the medium term financial strategy.

9.0   Legal and HR Implications

9.1   There are no legal implications arising directly out of this report. However, legal advice will be provided as required in relation to the implementation of initiatives and projects arising out of the strategy.

10.0   Ward Implications

10.1   The actions contained within the strategy have borough-wide impacts.

11.0   Health, Social and Economic Implications

11.1   There are a number of positive actions within the strategy such as:

- High Street grants have enabled a number of businesses to trade in the digital arena, along with the launch of MyTLC to promote local businesses to High Street shoppers.
- As part of the UKSPF Investment Plan for the Station Quarter, there are proposals to fit out two floors of incubation/accelerator space within the new Skills and Enterprise Hub. This will focus on office space for high growth potential new business start-ups and there will be a programme of university delivered growth support delivered on site.

12.0   Equality and Diversity Implications

12.1   Improvements have been and will continue to be made through the work achieved within the digital inclusions project which has seen existing schemes expand and new schemes be developed, working with a range of partners, including Age UK, Stay, Hub on the Hill, CVS and PODS.

13.0   Climate Change and Environmental Implications

13.1   The success of hybrid working has contributed greatly to the reduction of emissions through reducing business mileage, power usage within buildings and

the dramatic reduction of printing and the strategy supports hybrid working across the Borough.

14.0   Background Papers
  1   Digital Strategy
  2   Digital Strategy Cabinet Report 10th July 2021

15.0   Appendices

  A   Digital Strategy Tracker 2022

16.0   Report Sign Off

Signed off by	Date sent	Date signed off	Initials
Finance	20/09/2022	12/09/2022	DR & PT
Legal	21/09/2022	21/09/2022	AL