

From: Peter Oakford, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance,
Corporate and Traded Services

Lisa Gannon, Director of Technology

To: Policy and Resources Cabinet Committee, 17 January 2024

Subject: Digital Strategy 2024-27

Decision no: 23/00120

Key Decision: Yes - New Strategy or Policy outside of the Policy Framework

Classification: UNRESTRICTED

Future Pathway of report: Cabinet Member decision

Is the decision eligible for call-in? Yes

Summary:

The report summarises the reasons and approach taken for developing Kent County Council's (KCC) Digital Strategy 2024-2027.

Recommendations:

The Policy and Resources Cabinet Committee is asked to consider and endorse or make recommendations to the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Corporate and Traded Services on the proposed decision to adopt the Kent County Council Digital Strategy 2024-2027.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 In recent years the Council has made substantial investments in our technology, establishing robust architecture, and implementing modern internal tools such as the enterprise-level Microsoft 365 environments. We have also seen pockets of digital transformation across the organisation, however thus far there has been a fragmented approach, driven by divisional aspirations rather than corporate strategy. The negative consequences of this have been the emergence of a divergent and duplicative technology landscape, increased infrastructure/technology costs and resource cost to support these, diluted council branding, missed opportunities to make the most of our data and importantly, inconsistent digital experiences for our residents.
- 1.2 The Council committed to the Local Digital Declaration in July 2019. This commits to "design services that best meet the needs of citizens, challenge the technology market to offer the flexible tools and services we need to protect citizens' privacy and security, and deliver better value for money".

- 1.3 Consequently, it has been deemed timely that KCC develop a strategy which coordinates digital transformation activity and provides a blueprint linking all strategies that contain a digital element.

2 Developing the strategy

- 2.1 This strategy is very much a digital strategy written for staff, by staff. Successful digital transformation cannot be achieved without the buy-in of staff across the organisation and it is important that it addresses the disbenefits of past activity, aligning existing activity and providing the foundations to futureproof new activities.
- 2.2 Throughout development over 2,700 staff were invited to contribute and challenge the purpose, structure, and content, via a range of forums including staff groups, digital champions network, T200 network, bespoke innovation labs and key stakeholder groups such as directorate technology/system groups.
- 2.3 An iterative approach was taken to address any concerns and ensure that the content reflected the requirements of services across the organisation.

3 Digital Strategy

- 3.1 The Digital Strategy outlines our plans to bring about Digital Transformation within KCC. It serves as an overarching framework that encompasses our current and emerging digitally focused strategies and policies, acting as a cornerstone for future digital initiatives to ensure efforts are coordinated and aligned enabling us to drive positive change within the council. It is not the Technology Strategy, which focuses on our technical infrastructure, it is intentionally distinct, focusing instead on how we exploit technology to support and facilitate better digital experiences. The shared digital vision emerged from the extensive resident research that was conducted as part of the Resident and User Experience programmes; "People's digital experiences of KCC are accessible, inclusive, clear, trusted and designed with the user in mind to make their experience as positive as possible. They leave feeling confident, empowered, and respected".

- 3.2 The strategy is structured in the following way:

- Introduction
- Where we need to be – Our digital design principles and ambitions.
 - Ambition 1: Improve residents' digital experience.
 - Ambition 2: Simple, secure, and sharable
 - Ambition 3: Well used and used well
 - Ambition 4: Data led.
- Delivering the change
- Resourcing the delivery
- Monitoring and reporting progress
- Glossary
- Appendix 1 – Strategic context
- Appendix 2 – Digital Roadmap

- 3.3 Under each ambition we articulate what this means in practice, why it is important to us, which of the digital design principles it aligns to, how we will achieve it and what success would look like.
- 3.4 The Digital Roadmap is a live article which we expect to evolve dynamically over the lifetime of the strategy.

4 Strategic context: Framing Kent's Future

- 4.1 The four strategic ambitions within the Digital Strategy are built upon Framing Kent's Future, with the links to these documents made explicit within the appendices.
- 4.2 The Digital Strategy compliments the Council's Framing Kent's Future Strategy, which states: *"The most significant opportunity to reduce cost but also improve user experience is from further digitalisation of our service offer. This will support a greater shift for users online, which is the way most Kent residents prefer to access services, but critically, also underpins greater ability to automate more of the processes and interactions our residents have with the council."*

5 Strategic context: Securing Kent's Future

- 5.1 The Digital Strategy supports the Council's Securing Kent's Future Strategy, which states *"The Digital Strategy sets out how the council can accelerate digital change to drive further efficiencies whilst also improving service quality and responsiveness."*
- 5.2 Objective Four of Securing Kent's Future Strategy identifies the requirement for *"Further transforming the operating model of the Council"* and that *"almost certainly, KCC will need to be a leaner organisation"* and *"drive new ICT and digital capabilities into its core service offer"*.

6 Financial Implications

- 6.1 There are no financial implications in the development or establishing of this strategy. Individual digital projects will undoubtedly have cost implications that will be built into their respective business cases and project plans and be subject to normal governance processes.
- 6.2 The emergence of a divergent and duplicative technology landscape, increased infrastructure/technology costs and resource cost to support these, threatens our ability as an organisation to dispense our Best Value Duty.
- 6.3 Whilst there are no savings ascribed specifically to the strategy, it is anticipated the initiatives it supports and connects will result in better value for money.

7 Legal implications

There are no legal implications. However, the council has statutory duties under the Equality Act 2010 and Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) to prevent discrimination towards people with different protected characteristics, therefore

digital inclusion and accessibility have been embedded within the strategy.

8 Equalities implications

- 8.1 As mentioned in section 7 above, the council has statutory duties under the Equality Act 2010 to fulfil the requirements of the PSED, meaning that, as with any other project, any digital activity must first consider the potential impact upon people with protected characteristics.
- 8.2 An Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA) has been conducted (appendix B), which concluded that there are no potential negative impacts for the protected characteristics as a result of the strategy itself. Instead, it is anticipated that the strategy should have a positive impact in guiding services/digital projects to anticipate, consider and act upon any equality risks associated with digital transformation within the delivery of a service. This equality impact assessment suggests that the adoption of the strategy will have a positive impact on those with protected characteristics by taking a user-centred approach and maximising accessibility and inclusion. Adopting user-centred design methodologies when designing digital services will help combat digital exclusion by engaging with and involving groups at risk of digital exclusion in service redesign.
- 8.3 It should be noted that specific digital initiatives/projects will be required to complete project specific EqIAs in order to understand and mitigate any potential impacts. Officers will be able to utilise the resources and evidence contained within the strategy EqIA where appropriate.

9 Data Protection Implications

There are no data protection implications as a result of this strategy itself. Data Protection Impact Assessments will be completed at project level.

10 Other corporate implications

The Digital strategy will have a positive impact on other areas of work, due to the nature of Digital being integral to much of what is delivered.

11 Governance

- 11.1 Robust internal governance is in place in the form of a Digital steering group and working group, which interacts with Strategic Technology Board and Corporate Management Team as appropriate.
- 11.2 In line with the Council's governance process, as decision will involve the adoption of a new strategy, not included on the Policy Framework, a key decision will be required to adopt the new strategy.

12 Conclusions

The Digital strategy has been coproduced with staff to provide a shared direction and vision of what KCC's approach to Digital Transformation needs to be for the future. The adoption of the Digital Strategy is critical to enabling effective digital transformation.

Recommendations:

The Policy and Resources Cabinet Committee is asked to consider and endorse or make recommendations to the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Corporate and Traded Services on the proposed decision to adopt the Kent County Council Digital Strategy 2024-2027.

13. Background Documents

- 14.1 Appendix A - KCC Digital Strategy 2024-27
- 14.2 Appendix B - Equality Impact Assessment
- 14.3 Appendix C – Proposed Record of Decision

14 Contact details

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