Coventry City Council

Briefing note

To: Joint meeting of Finance and Corporate Services Scrutiny Board and Business, Economy and Enterprise Scrutiny Board
Date: 22nd November 2016
Subject: Digital Strategy Task and Finish Report Back

1 Purpose of the Note

1.1 To inform Finance and Corporate Services Scrutiny Board and Business, Economy and Enterprise Scrutiny Board of the outcomes and recommendations from the Digital Strategy Task and Finish Group.

2 Recommendations and actions

2.1 The Finance and Corporate Services Scrutiny Board and Business, Economy and Enterprise Scrutiny Board are recommended:

1) That the Task and Finish Group hold select committee style meetings with the three main broadband providers.

2) That the Task and Finish Group reconvenes every six months to review progress.

2.2 Finance and Corporate Services Scrutiny Board and Business, Economy and Enterprise Scrutiny Board support the Digital Strategy and recommend to Cabinet:

1) That the Strategy:

a) Clearly sets out our digital aspirations for the city.

b) Explains to residents why the focus in terms of broadband infrastructure is on businesses, due to the funding streams available, and how residential properties should benefit as a consequence of this investment. This is to emphasise the importance of connections for residential as well as businesses.

c) Should be flexible enough to cope with new technology as it becomes available and is therefore a living document.

It should be noted that these comments have already been incorporated into the Digital Strategy which will be presented to Cabinet on 29th November 2016.

2) That in implementing the Digital Strategy, the Council should:

a) Include the principle and opportunities for Digital transformation in our Council strategies and budget setting plans.

b) Continue to explore and implement new ways of working for all staff and Elected Members. This includes designing bespoke training and development for staff and Members based on need, following a Digital Skills survey and equipment audit. The role of change agents and more informal networks for sharing and building digital skills will also be developed.

c) Provide ongoing training and support to Members to encourage Members to maximise their use of digital and technology.

d) Continue to communicate and encourage the use of Council online services as a contact option for constituents and customers, by Members and Officers, and encourage feedback on their effectiveness.

e) Seek to maximise the opportunities to implement digital and new ways of working as we consolidate buildings - and the role that Finance and Corporate Services Scrutiny Board can play for example in taking an overview of kickstart action plans as teams prepare for the move.

f) Instruct officers to meet regularly with broadband service providers in the City to encourage investment in the City and share information on new developments and connectivity challenges.

g) Work with developers to ensure that new housing developments have high quality digital connectivity and support its inclusion in the Local Plan.

h) Inform the relevant officer, when Members have discussions with constituents on issues regarding Broadband at a ward level, to enable the Council to ensure conversations are joined up with service providers.

i) Commit to continue to improve our online services and ICT support, which includes benchmarking and opportunities to share services and ideas with neighbouring authorities.

3   Information/Background

3.1   The Task and Finish group was set up jointly by Finance and Corporate Services Scrutiny Board (SB1) and Business, Economy and Enterprise Scrutiny Board (SB3) as there are elements of digital which cross the two boards. SB1 have oversight of digital change within the Council and customer facing services, with SB3 looking at digital infrastructure that supports business growth. However, it is also recognised that the opportunities and work on digital covers every Cabinet portfolio.

3.2   The group formed to feed into the emerging digital strategy, and recognised that developing digital is fundamental in helping us deliver the Council Plan, the ambition of becoming a Top 10 City, to meet growing demand from residents and businesses and to deal with the significant reductions in Council resources. Redesigning services and setting policy with digital in mind gives us the opportunity to think differently, to work more efficiently, cost effectively and interact with customers in a way that many will find more convenient and effective.

3.3   Cllrs Kelly, McNicholas, Brown, Mayer and Ridley sat on the Digital Strategy Task and Finish Group.

3.4   The group met three times, with each meeting focussing on a different strand of the digital work. They also had a tour of the Customer Service Centre in Broadgate to see how new technology has transformed the service.

4   Meeting 1 – Broadband and other infrastructure

4.1   The Group met to discuss the challenges faced by businesses and residents in the City relating to the provision of high speed Broadband due to infrastructure issues and the fact that the Council has an influencing rather than a direct role in this issue. Broadband speeds and coverage continue to be an issue in the City and this will continue to be a challenge as the demand on the use of the internet for business and leisure in the City grows. We are increasingly reliant on Broadband for streaming programmes, home working as well as online shopping and business transactions. A key selling point for businesses locating in the City and for people buying houses, is good internet connectivity.

4.2 There is some external funding available to develop infrastructure which the Council is bidding for, however it is focussed on improving service provision for businesses and driving economic growth. It is important we inform residents that they may also benefit from the improved infrastructure as this will provide fibre to cabinets and make it easier to onward connect to residential properties in the future, as a by-product of investment in businesses.

4.3 Members of the group reported having discussions about issues with Ward provision of broadband at particular locations. It was agreed it would be helpful for Members to inform officers about these discussions as they will help to inform a citywide picture of provision and problems and any proposed solutions. It will help to reinforce the messages being given to providers. Broadband providers will also be invited into Scrutiny so that investment in the City can be understood.

5   Meeting 2 – Digital Service Transformation
5.1 The task and finish group were shown examples of digital transformation in the Customer Service centre and using digital to redesign service provision.

5.2 The team are working collaboratively across the Council to identify the priority areas for transformation based on impact, efficiency and effectiveness. This helps with meeting budget savings and improving the service we provide to customers.

5.3 The first example shown was the transformation of Homefinder and information and advice for homelessness. Homelessness services have seen an increase in demand which had increased wait times to make a decision and resulted in costly temporary accommodation whilst a decision is made.

5.4 The new process being developed is customer focussed and manages risk in a new way, putting the emphasis on the customer to provide evidence but also allowing them to submit it electronically. The process is standardised as the application is fully automated and progresses logically following a set route, prompting customers to only submit information relevant to their situation. The logic behind the form will result in an instant decision. This means the customer does not have a lengthy wait to find out the Council's decision.

5.5 Another example of a service being prioritised for digitalisation is Adult Social Care. Customers can complete an online self-assessment and information guide so that in 10-15 minutes they will know whether they may be eligible for support. All self-assessments completed are provided with a tailored information and advice offer, based on the responses they provided. This had only just gone live when the group met, but of the 50 online assessments completed so far, only 10 have gone on to require a further assessment by a social worker.

5.6 The Customer Service Centre are working with Adult Education to help people set up email accounts. The forms can also be completed by advocates for the applicant, for example from the Law Centre or CAB, as 12.6% of adults in Coventry have never been online.

5.7 The group also discussed effective change management and the importance of taking people with you on the transformation journey.

6   Meeting 3 – Digitally Enabled Workforce
6.1 The Council is developing a workforce strategy and a digital skills strategy which states that we need to 'develop the digital skills and confidence of our workforce so they are equipped to productively and proactively apply technology when delivering services'. The group also agreed that Elected Members should have access to the opportunities for the same skills development as employees.

6.2 The group were told about the rapid rollout of new technology to staff which includes the Mitel phone system, SharePoint, Office365 and Toshiba 2-in-1 laptops which also operate as tablets.

6.3 A Digital Skills Survey was undertaken and emerging results show that there is a clear generational curve on digital use and competence, although we are on a par with other councils in terms of digital competency. One of the challenges facing us as we look to

digitalise records, reduce paper and improve our data is that 66% of employees surveyed across the Council report having no or basic understanding of SharePoint, which is to replace our existing electronic filing system. This is being looked at as a priority action by HR and Organisational Development in ensuring the skills gap is addressed through building various support mechanisms such as mentoring and training and introduce digital assessments in recruitment and induction for new employees.

6.4   It was recommended that a digital skills survey be sent out specifically for Members to determine Member digital skills requirements and to agree an approach to how Members can be supported in meeting those needs. It was agreed that training should be varied to suit development needs i.e. digital workshops, e-learning and support from 'change agents' with digital expertise (identified staff, or other Members who have sound IT skills who can assist in providing digital support).At the same time, an audit of equipment provided to Members is recommended to ensure all have access to the most appropriate kit.

6.5   The technology and cultural changes being developed across the workforce, also gives Members the opportunity to reflect and benefit from new ways of working. For example, could Members' office space in the Council House be used differently to reflect the approach being taken at Friargate, could ward surgeries be delivered digitally or could Council meetings go "paper-lite" with the use of current available technology?

7   Next Steps
7.1   As a result of consideration of the three strands of the Digital Strategy, Members were able to gain a deeper understanding, identify areas of the strategy they considered important, ways to implement the strategy to gain maximum impact and ways that Elected Members could play a direct or influencing leadership role.

7.2   The Task and Finish Group will reconvene in six months to look at progress. This will include feeding back on meetings with Broadband providers, as well as the progress with online services and digital skills plans.

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