

TRAFFORD COUNCIL

Report to: Executive Meeting
Date: 27 September 2021
Report for: Information & Discussion
Report Of: Executive Member for Covid-19 Recovery and Reform
Report Author: Paul James, Chief Digital Officer

Report Title:

Trafford's Digital Strategy Update

Summary:

Trafford Council's IT Service only provided IT operations support prior to 2019, with minimal support to the Council's directorates to digitally modernise.

Digital is now recognised as a key enabler of the locality priorities and a contributor to the financial challenges the Council faces. The Council's Digital Strategy 2020-23 provides the focus for Trafford's digital ambitions over the coming years.

The Digital Strategy has been built around five themes. Three of these are outwardly focussed and will improve the citizen and community experience within Trafford. The other two are more focussed on ensuring the Council and the IT Service operate more effectively. Under these themes the Council aims to tackle digital exclusion; improve the Council's website and digital services; and digitally enable the workforce. In addition, there will be improvements to the Council's network, security and support services.

Good progress was achieved during 2020 and the first half of 2021 even though IT resources were stretched due to the Covid-19 pandemic and recovery. The Council's workforce was quickly enabled to work from home and improvement work continued to better position the Council to support Trafford communities. However, there remains much work to do in digitally modernising the Council and its operations.

Recommendations:

It is recommended that the Executive:

- Note the progress made on implementing the digital strategy as detailed within the report.

Contact person for access to background papers and further information:

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Background Papers: Digital Trafford Strategy - Summary Update (June 21)

Implications:

Relationship to Policy Framework/Corporate Priorities	<i>Trafford's Digital Strategy is a key enabler for the Council and Locality Plan priorities.</i>
Relationship to GM Policy or Strategy Framework	<i>Trafford's Digital Strategy is aligned with GMCA Digital Blueprint and GM Health and Social Care Partnership's Digital Strategy.</i>
Financial	<i>IT and Digital work programme and resources covered within this report are funded via the existing approved revenue budget and Capital Programme.</i>
Legal Implications:	<i>Not applicable.</i>
Equality/Diversity Implications	<i>Trafford's Digital Strategy incorporates equality and diversity implications.</i>
Sustainability Implications	<i>Trafford's Digital Strategy incorporates sustainability implications.</i>
Carbon Reduction	<i>Trafford's Digital Strategy incorporates carbon reduction implications.</i>
Resource Implications e.g., Staffing / ICT / Assets	<i>Not applicable.</i>
Risk Management Implications	<i>Not applicable.</i>
Health & Wellbeing Implications	<i>Not applicable.</i>
Health and Safety Implications	<i>Not applicable.</i>

1. Background

- 1.1. Trafford Council's IT Service only provided IT operations support prior to 2019, with minimal support to the Council's directorates to digitally modernise. The Council rarely had sufficient capacity to undertake the necessary business change to support the workforce to adapt to new ways of working when investments in IT systems were made. On occasions this led to ineffective processes remaining and a poor resident experience when accessing Council services.
- 1.2. Digital is a key enabler of the locality priorities and will contribute to the financial challenges the Council faces. However, sufficient support for associated business change activities and process improvements is necessary for digital investments to have greatest impact.
- 1.3. Trafford Council has increased investment in digital and provided greater leadership support in recent years. The Council's Digital Strategy has been developed which provides the focus for Trafford's ambitions over the coming years. This report provides an overview of the Digital Strategy; explains what progress has been achieved during 2020/21; and describes the plans for the next 18 months.

2. Trafford Digital

- 2.1. Digital is a theme that runs through each of the Council priorities, rather than a priority in its own right. Digital will perform an important role in supporting the Council, the people of Trafford, and the local economy to recover following the Covid pandemic. It will also contribute to addressing health inequalities within the borough and the delivery of the Trafford Health and Care locality Plan.
- 2.2. The Trafford Digital Strategy covers the foundations needed to underpin a comprehensive range of IT support services and the new capabilities needed to enable the Council to modernise and innovate in future years. The Digital Strategy has been built around five themes. Three of these are outwardly focussed and will improve the Citizen experience within Trafford. The aims of each are:
 - 2.2.1. **Digital Borough** – enhance the digital skills, access and confidence of those digitally excluded within Trafford. Work with partners and industry to improve the digital infrastructure within Trafford and explore opportunities for economic growth linked to digital.
 - 2.2.2. **Digital Services** - provide a wider range of high-quality digital services built around the customer experience. Ensure that online content is

clearly written and accessible. Explore opportunities to automate processes.

2.2.3. **Digital Workforce** - provide employees with modern digital tools so they can work more flexibly and can collaborate across different organisations. Provide training and business change support on the new tools.

2.3. Two of the themes are more focussed on ensuring the council and the IT Service operate more effectively:

2.3.1. **Digital Organisation** - provide modern digital infrastructure and systems to support new ways of working. Ensure the organisation's data and systems are well protected from cyber threats. Align systems and infrastructure across partners.

2.3.2. **Digital Support Services** - provide improved digital services and support from the Trafford IT and Digital Teams. Enhance self-service provision and automation of support processes. Ensure support teams are sufficiently trained.

3. Aims and expected outcomes from delivery of the Trafford Digital Strategy

Citizen, Community and Business Perspective

3.1. The Council is committed to creating the environment for good digital access and opportunities within the borough. The Covid-19 pandemic means that some of the work scheduled for 2022-23 needs to be brought forward and enhanced. Specifically, Digital Inclusion has been prioritised for 2021-22.

3.2. The move to digital delivery of services can help the Council to reduce costs, while improving the customer experience. It also enables the Council to redirect resources to support those who are most in need and require more complex direct support. The people of Trafford want to transact and engage with the Council via digital channels but expect a good quality experience akin to those provided by banks, supermarkets and shopping sites.

3.3. Trafford's multi-agency workforce struggles to share information and collaborate across partner organisations. Remote working has rapidly increased due to Covid-19 and is set to remain for many. Existing IT solutions are insufficient and do not meet the requirements of a modern smart worker. New technology-based tools for the workforce will allow employees to maximise their potential and work more efficiently. Automating mundane and repetitive tasks will free employees' time to focus on valuable and productive work.

Organisational Perspective

- 3.4. The response to Covid-19 saw an increase in collaboration with partners and the VCSE sector working together to support communities through the pandemic. This accelerated the need to join IT systems and bring data together from disparate sources to provide better direct care, and to enable research to respond to the pandemic. The increased dependence on IT systems and data means that effective cyber protection and appropriate business continuity processes are essential.
- 3.5. Trafford committed to invest in its IT and Digital resources in 2019 and created a new IT leadership function that was jointly funded by the Council and CCG. The need to transform the IT and Digital Service, and improve processes and tools, remains a priority as recovery progresses and business as usual activities recommence.

4. Challenges to be addressed through delivery of the Digital Strategy

- 4.1. There are many priorities and challenges to be addressed through the delivery of the Digital Strategy over the next few years. This section describes specific examples, with a more detailed view provided in the Digital Trafford Strategy - Summary Update (June 21) background document.
- 4.2. We need to support activity to improve Trafford citizens' and communities' skills, confidence and access to digital equipment so they can interact with modern society. There needs to be specific focus on all communities reaching an agreed base level and that people can make the most of digital opportunities, should they choose to do so, reducing social exclusion.
- 4.3. The pace of improvements to Trafford's digital services and website has been slow as there was limited dedicated resource or focus prior to 2020. Where work has been done on the website there has been minimal transformation of the full processes, which has led to a fragmented and frustrating resident experience. Further work is needed to ensure processes involving multiple organisations operate effectively, and systems are properly linked, e.g., processes involving the Contact Centre and Amey. An overhaul of website content is also required as parts of the website are out of date or not used. There has been limited focus on opportunities to automate manual processes and improve integration between on-line forms and supporting systems.
- 4.4. Many of the workforce received an updated device during 2020 to support the rapid increase in remote working. Video Conferencing and Electronic Messaging was provided via Microsoft Teams; but this was a rushed deployment to meet immediate needs as the Covid pandemic spread. The Council's current version of Microsoft Office doesn't enable people to access

information and documents easily while on the go, or while working remotely. There are many additional features within Microsoft Teams not yet deployed that will assist with remote and flexible working approaches. Changes are needed to the Council's meeting rooms, committee rooms and office spaces to support the smart ways of working to be introduced as more people return to the office.

- 4.5. Trafford has previously provided limited training and support with the introduction of new systems, which has led to many colleagues not getting the best from the investment in digital; and not adapting to new ways of working that digital can facilitate. It also puts additional pressure on the IT Service Desk Support Team and can lead to frustration as colleagues wait for support.
- 4.6. Trafford Council does not currently maintain a strategic oversight of its IT Systems as individual directorates are responsible for procuring and maintaining these systems. This results in limited alignment and re-use of digital investments across the Council. It can also lead to insufficient resources allocated to fully implement and link systems to other parts of the Council, e.g., the Civica Customer Relationship Management System (CRM). The limited strategic oversight and devolved approach is impacting on the Council's Cyber Security and Business Continuity capabilities. This is a significant risk as cyber security threats increase.
- 4.7. The internal IT and Digital Service has not developed its own digital self-service offering and does not have effective processes in place. As a result, a lot of the interaction with IT is manual and time consuming.

5. Progress on delivering the Digital Strategy during 2020/21

- 5.1. Good progress was achieved during 2020 and the first half of 2021 even though IT resources were stretched due to the Covid pandemic and recovery. This section provides a high-level view of the main achievements.

5.2. Digital Borough

- Device Loan Scheme for the public - launched a device loan scheme to provide laptops and tablets with 4G connectivity to residents who are unable to access online services.
- Digital Champions – formed a team of digital champions operating out of Trafford libraries to provide support and guidance to citizens who are to less able to use new technology.
- Laptops for Learners – under the Leader's Campaign, provided 350 donated laptops to Trafford's disadvantaged school children during lockdown to ensure they continued to participate in remote delivery of their

education. In addition, distributed 650 laptops and 120 4G dongles to Trafford schools to support disadvantaged children as part of a national scheme.

- Digital Grants to Trafford VCSE Organisations - awarded £47k Digital Inclusion VCSE Grants to 17 community projects to enable improved digital inclusion for Trafford residents and businesses.

5.3. Digital Services

- New Digital Services Team – a business case has been agreed to create a new Digital Services Team to deliver improvements to Trafford's digital services and website. Recruitment and the procurement of digital tools is underway, and the new team is expected to be operational by January 2022.
- Digital Modernisation of Exchequer Services – reviewed processes and identified several opportunities within Exchequer Services to improve efficiency through automating manual processes; improving data matching between systems; and improving on-line benefits forms. The first improvement project commenced in July 2021 to improve the Adult Social Care New Referrals process.
- Electronic Building Access Solution – rapid procurement and implementation of a new system to manage employee access to the building to support the Covid Recovery Plan.

5.4. Digital Workforce

- Supported Remote/Home Working - rapid rollout of Video Conferencing and Messaging (Microsoft Teams) to support home working. Provided over 1,500 pieces of IT equipment to support increased home working; including headsets, mice, keyboards, risers and USB hubs.
- Meeting Room Equipment – three meeting rooms and a collaborative area in Trafford Town Hall, and a meeting room at Waterside are equipped with new technology to support mixed physical and video conference discussions as a proof of concept ahead of wider rollout.
- Microsoft 365 full rollout – the full version of Microsoft 365 will be delivered via 5 phased releases between September 2021 and June 2022.
- Digital Champions Network – recruited over 100 Digital Champions from the Council's workforce to provide peer support and guidance to Trafford employees and Councillors during the M365 rollout.
- Windows 10 upgrade and device replacement – finalised the replacement of Windows 7 devices and the provision of over 1,200 laptop/tablet hybrid devices to support agile working, including the new Councillors from the May 2021 election.

5.5. Digital Organisation

- Increased capacity and resilience to support home working – increased the capacity of the Council's internet feed and the Virtual Private Network (VPN) to support the rapid increase in home working and ensure connections were stable. Installed an additional internet link at Sale Waterside which provides improved network resilience.
- Telephony systems for home working – provided a new software based telephone system to enable the Contact Centre, Exchequer Services, Greater Manchester Shared Services and other public facing services to work from home.
- E-mail Phishing Campaign – launched a campaign to raise awareness of the risks from e-mail phishing and to provide training and guidance to better protect the Council.
- Local Full Fibre Network – finalised the procurement of a partner to install a new dark fibre network across 75 Council sites within the borough. 50% of the installations are complete with all sites expected to be completed by November 21. This is a collaboration with six other Greater Manchester local authorities and the fire service.

5.6. Digital Support Services

- Mobilised the IT Service Desk and support teams to work from home – quickly mobilised the IT support teams to work from home to continue providing support to the Council's workforce.
- Met increased support demands – the volume of calls to the Service Desk has doubled as a result of the Covid pandemic and the duration of calls has increased due to the added complexity of supporting people working from home.
- Schools Support – provided a range of support services to schools to ensure they were able to continue to educate pupils throughout the pandemic.
- Request for Change process – 186 IT projects were delivered via the Request for Change Process during 2020 providing vital IT solutions to Council services.
- FreshService IT System – procured and started the implementation of a new IT Service Management tool (FreshService) which will include new self-service functionality and improved management and routing of IT incidents.

6. Planned activity for 2021 and 2022

6.1. The second half of 2021 and into 2022 will be a busy time for the IT and Digital Service as it continues to deliver a comprehensive programme of digital improvement and modernisation initiatives. Capacity remains a

challenge as recruitment to additional posts is proving difficult due to demand exceeding supply in the local digital jobs market.

6.2. The following bullet points cover the main areas of focus for the next 12 months. Full details are provided in the Digital Strategy document included in the Digital Trafford Strategy - Summary Update (June 21) background document.

- Digital Inclusion remains a priority with expansion of the digital skills support and loan device schemes planned. Mapping digital skills and digital inclusion indicators for each of the Trafford neighbourhoods will be undertaken to help inform targeted digital inclusion interventions and support.
- The new Digital Services Team will begin working with Council departments from January 2022 to modernise processes, improve the website and online services, and automate manual processes.
- The rollout of Microsoft 365 to the Council's workforce will provide new and enhanced applications to support increased collaboration, flexible working and improved security. New equipment will be installed in meeting rooms and collaboration spaces once evaluation is complete to support new smart working approaches.
- Implementation and configuration of the Council's new IT Network will ensure the Council and Schools continue to operate reliably and securely. The Council's new network will operate over the new fibre cabling installed under the GM Local Full Fibre Network Programme. Cyber Security controls and processes will be enhanced to ensure the Council continues to do all that it can to protect its data and systems.
- The new IT Service Management Tool (FreshService) will be fully implemented, including a new Customer Portal that will make it easier to log issues with the Service Desk and monitor progress.

6.3. Further work will be undertaken with the Council's Directorates and Members following the recent refresh of the Council's priorities, to ensure the Digital Strategy continues to align with Trafford's priorities.

7. Recommendations

It is recommended that the Executive:

- Note the progress made on implementing the digital strategy as detailed within the report.

Finance Officer Clearance ...PC.....

Legal Officer Clearance ...SL.....

CORPORATE DIRECTOR'S SIGNATURE

G. Bentley

To confirm that the Financial and Legal Implications have been considered and the Executive Member has cleared the report.