NEWCASTLE-UNDER-LYME BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO FINANCE, ASSETS AND PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date 19ᵗʰ September 2019

Report Title: **ICT Strategy and Development Programme**

Submitted by: **Head of Customer and Digital Services**

Portfolio: **Corporate and Service Improvement, People and Partnerships**

Ward(s) affected: **All Indirectly**

Purpose of the Report

This report outlines the significant development programme currently underway within the Council's ICT Service. It describes the current priorities, the ties the service has with the Council's Digital Programme and how the services future strategy will be developed.

Recommendations

1) **That the Committee receive and note the information provided.**

Reasons

Not applicable.

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1.   **Background**

1.1.   The Council's in-house ICT team are responsible for the day to day operation and development of the Council's ICT services. The 16 strong team comprises of four primary functions:

- Desktop & Service Desk
  This team are responsible for the front facing elements of the ICT Service. They run the Council's service desk function, maintain desktop equipment and software, service printers, support audio visual services and co-ordinate support from more specialist ICT groups.

- Applications Support
  The Application Support team ensure that specialist line of business software remains operational, accessible and up-to-date. They perform complex data analysis, underpin the delivery of a number of key Council activities, resolve any complex issues and work with partner organisations. The team also provides the Council's only professional software development resources.

- Infrastructure
  The infrastructure team develop and maintain the Council's "hidden" ICT systems.   The Council's network, server estate, storage systems and core operating software all fall within their remit. They are also responsible for working with partner organisations such as SCC to facilitate shared services such as the Castle House network and shared Staffordshire Wi-Fi.

- Project Management
  ICT has two dedicated project managers. They are responsible for ensuring that the ICT elements of any Council projects are fully delivered and the anticipated benefits achieved. The work closely with ICT Management and the other ICT specialists to ensure co-ordination.

1.2.   The service supports nearly 400 active ICT users, including staff, Councillors, partner organisations and suppliers. The also look after 400 desktop machines, two data centres, 221 servers and 97tb of stored information. They also provide support at Castle House for Staffordshire County Council staff and run the shared network infrastructure that makes our combined operations possible.

1.3.   Until recently, much of ICT's work was focused on delivering the Council's migration to Castle House. However, the past 12 months have seen ICT move beyond this significant project and begin the process of moving forward in other areas.

1.4.   The service has an ambitious plan for the coming year and its intrinsic involvement in developing the Council's digital services will truly push the boundaries of what is possible. This report seeks to highlight some of the significant development programmes the service is currently undertaking and how it plans to address the Council's ICT Strategy moving forward.

2.   **Current ICT Service Plan**

2.1.   The current ICT Service Plan 2019/20 was formulated in early 2019. For the first time, the plan was put together in conjunction with other service areas; fully taking account of their identified ICT requirements and matching these to an activity in ICT's own plan.

2.2.   Services were challenged to identify their ICT requirements during a series of meetings and were also asked to identify any support needs for initiatives ICT had identified through a review of individual service plans. This review highlighted any initiatives that conceivably may have an ICT requirement but had not specifically identified this. This engagement was very well received by other services and resulted in a much more realistic plan.

2.3.   A full copy of the current development plan is included in Appendix One. The most significant streams currently underway are outlined below:

- Windows 10 and Office 365
  The Council's desktop (and server) infrastructure is universally Microsoft Windows based. Principally this is because the vast majority of our business applications only work on Windows and their integration with productivity tools is universally based on using Microsoft Office.

  Support for the Council's current Windows 7 / Office 2010 combination ends in January 2020 and as such, ICT are actively migrating users to Windows 10 and Office 16.

  Our initial plan is move users onto the updated Windows 10 operating system and introduce the 2016 version of Office on premise (due to application compatibility). Once this roll out is complete (est. Nov 19) ICT will begin looking at the "value add" elements of Office 365.

  The roll out of Windows 10 has been left until a relatively late stage, principally as an economic decision; saving the Council approximately £26,000 in licensing costs during the past three years. However, this decision was also made with the knowledge that our current systems would facilitate a rapid roll out of the new software when it was ultimately required.

- Developing the Digital Ambitions of the Council
  The Council's Digital Delivery programme has the capacity to truly revolutionise how services are delivered and how the Council engages and supports its communities in the future. It has the capability to underpin the delivery of every Council priority, and ICT is a critical component.

  Currently, ICT has dedicated 50% of its project management and 25% of its application support capacity to delivering the initial stages of the digital programme. Primarily to oversee the retirement of the Lagan Customer Relationship Management system, the team has paved the way for the adoption of a larger digital agenda, to support the authority over the next four years.

An example of the group's early success is the introduction of an online signup process for garden waste. Three quarters of the 20,000 subscriptions were completed entirely online. In context, signing up over the phone takes approximately seven minutes, meaning the online process removed the equivalent of 1,750 hours of work – or put another way, four full-time staff, working flat out for 12 weeks.

Cabinet are currently considering the adoption of a Digital Strategy which will ultimately shape our future services. Effective integration of ICT systems, appropriate technology support and the enablement of staff to work in an agile way are key components that ICT will either directly support or have significant involvement in delivering.

- Establishing a Dedicated Governance Function
  This initiative, whilst never really suitable as an ICT driven activity, but was included in our plan due to the services significant involvement in the Council's GDPR preparations and our formation of the corporate Information Governance Group.

  Whilst this initiative is now being driven forward by the Council's Head of Legal Services, ICT will still play a significant role in the future. Whilst technical controls are not the only form of Information Governance the Council needs, ICT has a significant role in ensuring the Confidentiality, Integrity and Availability of our information assets both now and in the future.

  As work within the Legal Service progresses, ICT will support any initiative that is launched. Everyone at the Council needs to take information governance seriously and as we progress further with digital delivery, this requirement will only grow.

- Re-procurement of the Council's Microsoft Licensing Agreement.
  The Council's Microsoft products are licensed on a rolling three year arrangement. On May 31st 2020 the Council's current agreement will end and a replacement will be executed. Work is already underway to prepare for this and ensure the Council achieves the best value possible.

  Microsoft's licensing terms and coverage are continually changing. Multiple types of licence cover identical products and it is the responsibility of the consumer to ensure it uses the best licensing model to cover its requirements. A mistake in version or coverage can be extremely costly and equally, not planning for future service delivery can be very restrictive.

  Microsoft represents the biggest individual software expense within the authority. Every year, in excess of £115,000 is spent on our current licensing arrangements which already receive the highest level of discount possible through the use of a Crown Commercial Services framework. Unfortunately as outlined in section 3, this cost is completely unavoidable.

2.4. Commentary on the progress of other ICT initiatives is included in the Appendix One plan.

3. **Alternatives to Microsoft**

3.1. As mentioned in 2.3, procurement of licences for Microsoft software represents a considerable expense and previously, ICT have been asked if alternatives could be identified. Unfortunately, this is not possible as our line of business applications require the use of Microsoft products.

3.2. Table 1 details a few of the Council's core applications which are critical to the delivery of Council services. As show, these applications generally require the Microsoft stack for server operations and in most instances, are also integrated with Microsoft desktop applications such as Office or Outlook.

3.3. Whilst the more recent additions to the Council's software are Linux-Apache-MySQL-PHP based, most tend to be minor web based systems with fewer users or hosted applications managed by the provider. A number of the Council web-based applications can be used on alternative platforms, but again, due to the relatively limited number of applications that work in this way, it simply isn't feasible in most instances.

Product	Service Area	Server OS	Database	Desktop OS	Integration
Northgate Revenues and Benefits	Revenues and Benefits	Windows Server	Oracle	Windows 10	MS Office MS Outlook
Civica Financials	All	Windows Server	MS SQL Server	Windows 10	MS Office MS Exchange
Northgate Images@Work	All	Windows Server	MS SQL Server	Windows 10	MS Office
Civica APP	Licensing Environmental Protection	Windows Server	MS SQL Server	Windows 10	MS Office MS Exchange
IDOX Uniform	Planning, Building Control, Address Gazetteer, Property Services	Windows Server	Oracle	Windows 10	MS Office MS Exchange
Drupal CMS	Website and Intranet	Windows Server	MySQL	Any	MS Exchange

Table 1 – Example software requirements for line of business applications.

3.4. It should be noted that although the Council does incur considerable costs for its Microsoft licences, through our use of a virtualised environment we do not pay for licences on a one-to-one basis. For example, our licensing of SQL Server covers just two physical servers. Those two servers run over a hundred virtual environments, each with SQL Server installed. In our environment, it wouldn't matter if we ran 20 or 200 instances, the licensing costs would not change.

3.5. The Council also receives a number of benefits as part of its Microsoft package. Our Office 365 subscriptions include an ever-growing range of value added extras that the Council will look to roll out following the introduction of Windows 10. Collaborative tools such as Microsoft Teams, SharePoint and Staff Hub are just a few examples of inclusive, value add items.

3.6. We also receive approximately £24,000 worth of official Microsoft training and staff based benefits, such as reduced personal Office 365 subscriptions and unlimited online training (these offers are also available to Members).

3.7. ICT's two main objectives with regards to Microsoft licensing are to remain legally compliant and to optimise our costs. We will remove any licences that are not required and always seek to use the most cost effective route possible for procurement. Whilst we cannot avoid Microsoft products, we absolutely seek to ensure the Council receives the best value possible from what we have.

4. **The ICT Strategy**

4.1. A copy of the current ICT Strategy is included in Appendix Two. It should be noted that this is overdue for review.

4.2. There has been significant change within both the technology sector and the Council as an organisation since the strategy was last updated in 2015. However, despite the relative age of the document, its general principles and much of its content are actually still valid:

- Governance

The Governance arrangements for ICT outlined within the strategy are still generally accurate. The service remains heavily influenced by the Executive Management Team and Cabinet whilst links with the Council's Information Governance and other corporate groups have grown stronger. The ICT Steering group was disbanded, but steps are being taken to replace this.

- Enabling Change
  Many of the objectives discussed under this theme have simply evolved into different initiatives. The Customer Journey Programme for example would now be considered as Digital Delivery – which would also encompass elements such as rapid service development (now known as Agile) and empowering users. Our strategy was simply ahead of the current terminology.

- Flexible Service Delivery
  This theme was a key component in achieving the Council's migration to Castle House. We have now distributed our infrastructure, services can be delivered from any location, staff have the tools to agile work and our technology is being used to encourage collaboration. ICT has delivered on every identified outcome with considerable operational and strategic success.

- Value for Money
  The key objectives within this theme still remain valid and drive how ICT delivers services. We do seek to optimise our investment in services, we work with our suppliers and partners to reduce costs, we recognise and follow invest to save opportunities and we have consolidated applications as far as possible.

4.3. As said, there has been significant change since the last review and the ICT strategy does need to be updated. Before the close of 2019, ICT will have completed a review of its strategic direction to address a number of key themes:

- *Our vision* – What ICT's delivery is actually going to mean for our authority;
- *Governance* – How ICT will contribute to corporate priorities and be accountable for our service;
- *Technology* – Establishing the technology "stack" we will use and standards for delivery;
- *Infrastructure* – How our underlying infrastructure will evolve and the standards we will adopt;
- *Productivity* – The key services we will support and develop to empower our user base;
- *Front of House* – Clear priorities and standards for user and citizen facing systems;
- *Data, Information & Analytics* – How we will support our services to free their data;
- *Sourcing* – The standards we will apply to sourcing our solutions and services;
- *Skills* – How we will ensure the Council's staff maintain and develop their technical capability;
- *Delivery and Funding* – How we will fund and deliver the strategy content.

4.4. Given the complex nature of the ICT strategy, ICT intends to fully engage with stakeholder groups such as Executive Management, Heads of Service, Business Managers and Elected Members. The planned outcomes of ICT's strategy will fundamentally affect how services are delivered in the future, so consideration of multiple viewpoints will be critical. ICT will also seek to ensure its strategy directly supports other initiatives, such as digital delivery, customer access and Newcastle's partnerships.

5. **Outcomes Linked to Sustainable Community Strategy and Corporate Priorities**

5.1. The ICT Strategy and Service Plan links to the achievement of all Corporate Priorities.

6. **Legal and Statutory Implications**

6.1. There are numerous legislative and statutory implications to ICT's Strategy and Service Plans. These are generally considered on a case by case basis but usually include:

- General Data Protection Regulations
- Privacy and Electronic Communications Regulations
- Data Protection Act

- Computer Misuse Act

7. **Equality Impact Assessment**

7.1. Not applicable.

8. **Financial and Resource Implications**

8.1. ICT's Revenue budget is approximately £1,626,630. This covers the operation of the ICT Team and all associated costs for software and hardware support.

8.2. A capital programme of approximately £215,000 is allocated for this financial year and the ICT Development Fund is topped up each year by a further £50,000.

8.3. The ICT Team composes of 15.5 FTE Officers:

- 1x ICT Operations & Development Manager
- 1x ICT Infrastructure Manager
- 8x Senior ICT Officers
- 3.5x ICT Officers
- 2x Project Managers

9. **Major Risks**

9.1. Not applicable.

10. **Key Decision Information**

10.1. This report is not considered as a key decision as no decisions are required.

11. **Earlier Cabinet/Committee Resolutions**

11.1. 14/01/2015 - Cabinet, [ICT Strategy](#)

11.2. 26/03/2008 – Cabinet, [ICT Strategy](#)

12. **List of Appendices**

12.1. Appendix One – ICT Service Plan

12.2. Appendix Two – ICT Strategy