BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO THE GOVERNANCE AND AUDIT COMMITTEE

28 JANUARY 2022

REPORT OF THE CHIEF OFFICER – FINANCE, PERFORMANCE AND CHANGE

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

1. Purpose of report

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an update to the Governance and Audit Committee on the Council's Digital Transformation Programme.

1.2 In particular, the report highlights key activities and actions following the Audit Wales "Review of the Council's Arrangements to Become a 'Digital Council' – Bridgend County Borough Council".

2. Connection to corporate well-being objectives/other corporate priorities

2.1 This report assists in the achievement of the following corporate well-being objectives under the **Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015**:

- **Supporting a successful sustainable economy** – taking steps to make the county borough a great place to do business, for people to live, work, study and visit, and to ensure that our schools are focussed on raising the skills, qualifications and ambitions for all people in the county borough.

- **Helping people and communities to be more healthy and resilient** - taking steps to reduce or prevent people from becoming vulnerable or dependent on the Council and its services. Supporting individuals and communities to build resilience, and enable them to develop solutions to have active, healthy and independent lives.

- **Smarter use of resources** – ensure that all resources (financial, physical, ecological, human and technological) are used as effectively and efficiently as possible and support the creation of resources throughout the community that can help to deliver the Council's well-being objectives.

3. Background

3.1 During 2016, the Council embarked on a Digital Transformation Programme that had a citizen-centric focus. The aim of this programme was to introduce a single digital platform (My Account) to allow citizens to interact online with key Council services.

3.2 To further strengthen its digital focus the Council published its Digital Strategy in September 2020. The strategy is a four year plan that sets out how the Council will adopt new approaches to modernise service delivery to its residents and partners.

There are 3 key themes within the strategy:

- Digital Citizen
- Digital Council
- Digital Place

3.3   To provide governance for the Digital Transformation Programme and ensure that the aims and principles of the Digital Strategy are delivered, a Digital Transformation Board was established, with the first meeting being held in October 2020.

3.3.1   The Digital Transformation Board works to an agreed Terms of Reference which defines its membership, overall objectives, outputs, context/purpose, reporting arrangements and timescales.

3.3.2   The purpose of the Board is to develop, coordinate and manage digital transformation activity across the Council ensuring service improvements and savings are delivered in line with the associated Business Case, Digital Strategy, Corporate Plan and Medium Term Financial Strategy.

3.3.3   All Directorates currently have representation on the Digital Transformation Board which is chaired by the Chief Officer – Finance, Performance and Change ensuring a direct link with Corporate Management Board (CMB). Directorates are represented by a Group or Business Manager with other key attendees being:

- Head of Partnership Services
- Deputy Head of Finance
- Group Manager - Transformation and Customer Services
- Group Manager - ICT
- Senior Project and Programme Officer
- Project Leads

3.4   As noted in paragraph 1.2, the Digital Transformation Board was subject to an external review by Audit Wales who undertook a "Review of the Council's Arrangements to Become a 'Digital Council'".

3.4.1   The field work for the review was completed between November 2020 and January 2021 with the final report being published in June 2021. The report is for internal use only but can be circulated to members of the Governance and Audit Committee if required.

4.   Current situation/proposal

4.1   Since the Digital Transformation Programme was established in 2016, it has grown significantly and currently has 15 projects within its remit. A list of these projects can be found in **Appendix 1**.

4.1.1   All Directorates have at least one project aligned to the Digital Transformation Programme which evidences its support not just for the Digital Citizen but for the Digital Place and Digital Council.

4.2   As noted in paragraphs 1.2 and 3.4, the Digital Transformation Programme was subject to an external review by Audit Wales with its report being published in June 2021.

4.2.1 The Audit Wales report made 3 proposals for improvement. The headlines of which are:
       P1 - Improving the Digital Strategy.
       P2 - Strengthening governance arrangements to deliver the Digital Strategy.
       P3 - Improving communication to evoke the culture to embrace change.

       The Digital Transformation Board responded by developing an action plan aligned to the proposed areas for improvement.

4.2.2 Since Audit Wales completed their fieldwork in January 2021 a number of key activities have been completed across the programme:

       System Developments

       • The Digital Access Platform (My Account) went live on 29th March 2021.
       • The Northgate Citizen Access Platform (Council Tax and Housing Benefits) went live on 7th April 2021.
       • The rollout of iTrent People Manager with absence entry continued and was expanded across the Education and Family Support Directorate in June 2021.
       • The ALB Legal Case Management System went live on 20th September 2021.
       • Phase 1 of the Councillor Portal was launched in October 2021.
       • Initial workshops have been held with staff from several service areas to explore potential automation opportunities.

       Promotion and Support of Digital Activities

       • Monthly digital proposal meetings to explore and agree potential digital developments chaired by the Group Manager - ICT began in June 2021.
       • 16 Digital Champions were appointed across the Authority in September 2021. All Digital Champions have completed an initial training programme and are currently developing their terms of reference.
       • The Digital Transformation Board agreed funding for two fixed term Customer Experience and Improvement Officers in August 2021 with staff appointed in September 2021. The Customer Experience and Improvement Officers have been instrumental in developing and testing online forms and will be encouraging residents in 2022 to get involved to help develop and shape our online services.
       • The Digital Programme is a standard agenda item at the monthly Trade Union meetings.
       • In December 2021, representation from Trade Unions at the Digital Transformation Board was confirmed.

       Review of the Digital Transformation Governance Arrangements

       • As the Digital Transformation Board is now well established, it was agreed that from December 2021 meetings be held bi-monthly with the caveat that ad-hoc meetings be called when required.

- From October 2021, it was agreed that CMB receive an update on the Digital Transformation Programme bi-monthly.
- From December 2021 the Digital Transformation Board will report to Cabinet and Corporate Management Board (CCMB) quarterly.

The review of the Digital Transformation Board governance arrangements supports a robust quality assurance mechanism to:

- ensure Cabinet and key local authority officers are kept informed of the progress of the programme;
- provide an escalation process for those issues or risks that cannot be resolved at Board level or require high level decisions to be made.

4.2.3 Further plans have been agreed and are underway to ensure the following key priorities are completed in preparation for the next Digital Transformation Board meeting in February 2022:

- Review the Digital Strategy.
- Review the Digital Strategy Action Plan.
- Review the ICT Action Plan.
- Review the Board's Terms of Reference including membership.

4.3 As well as being the subject of an external review, the Digital Transformation Programme was also included within the Council's Internal Audit Services review of project and contract management with the final report published in October 2021.

4.3.1 Although the focus of the review was not directly related to Digital Transformation, the report did highlight an action for the Corporate Transformation Team which, in turn, supports the Digital Transformation Programme:

"We recommend the Corporate Transformation Team ensure the corporate project management guidance is up to date and communicated to all staff responsible for overseeing and/or delivering projects."

4.3.2 To address this action the Corporate Transformation Team has:

- reviewed the project documentation and published updated documentation to its page on the Council's intranet;
- liaised with the internal Communications team and arranged for a message to be included in the weekly Bridgenders bulletin on 30th September 2021, to remind staff who are involved in project management, to use the updated project toolkit, templates and supporting information.

5. Effect upon policy framework and procedure rules

5.1 There is no effect on policy framework and procedure rules.

6.   Equality Act 2010 implications

6.1   The protected characteristics identified within the Equality Act, Socio-economic Duty and the impact on the use of the Welsh language have been considered in the preparation of this report. As a public body in Wales, the Council must consider the impact of strategic decisions, such as the development or the review of policies, strategies, services and functions. This is an information report, therefore it is not necessary to carry out an Equality Impact assessment in the production of this report. It is considered that there will be no significant or unacceptable equality impacts as a result of this report.

7.   Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 implications

7.1   The table below details how this report aligns to one or more of the 5 ways of working of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) 2015 Act:

Long Term	The Digital Transformation Programme supports projects that enable improved, consistent and sustainable services and ways of working to enhance residents and partners experience.
Preventative	Developing digital solutions for staff, residents and partners provides sustainable services which promote self-service and independence to prevent reliance on resources.
Integration	The Digital Transformation Programme supports the integration of systems across the Authority providing a seamless journey for residents and partners.
Collaboration	Collaboration across Directorates and Service Areas to share resources, skills and knowledge.
Involvement	Consultation exercises underpin the Digital Strategy and, where appropriate, individual projects within the programme.

8.   Financial implications

8.1   The Digital Transformation Programme has allocated capital and revenue budgets, funded from one-off earmarked reserves. At the start of 2021-22 these totalled £1.297 million, but there are currently commitments of £0.930 million against these budgets. Requests for funding to support digital projects are assessed and ratified by the Digital Transformation Board on a case by case basis, to determine whether or not funding is committed to these schemes.

8.2   The financial position, including commitments and spend against these budgets, is a standing agenda item at the Digital Transformation Board meetings.

9.   Recommendations

9.1   It is recommended that the Governance and Audit Committee consider this report, acknowledge the work completed to date and note the planned actions to continue to support and deliver Digital Transformation across the Council.

CARYS LORD
CHIEF OFFICER – FINANCE, PERFORMANCE AND CHANGE
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Contact officer: Martin Morgans
                            Head of Partnership Services

Telephone: (01656) 642154

Email: martin.morgans@bridgend.gov.uk

Postal address: Civic Offices, Angel Street, Bridgend, CF31 4WB

Background documents: None