

# BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

## REPORT TO DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

23 FEBRUARY 2023

### REPORT OF THE CHIEF OFFICER - FINANCE, PERFORMANCE AND CHANGE

#### UPDATE ON THE DIGITAL PLATFORM AND MEMBER PORTAL

#### 1. Purpose of report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide the Committee with the background and update for the implementation of the digital platform and member portal.

#### 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 The Authority's Digital Strategy includes 3 themes - "Digital Citizen", "Digital Council" and "Digital Place". The Digital Council theme focuses on evaluating current business processes and establishing how we can fundamentally change the way of working, redesigning services to better services for a 24/7 digital citizen.

One of the aims within the Digital Strategy is to streamline routine and repetitive processes, delivering end-to-end connections to back-office systems with the ambition of delivering efficiencies.

The Council's Digital Principles have been developed to underpin the foundations of the Five Ways of Working within the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, aligning a "Digital First" approach, and encapsulating the good practice principles identified by Society of Information Technology Management (SocITM). Digital services will therefore:

- Be designed around the people who are going to use them, across the whole sphere of service delivery
- Be integrated where possible to deliver seamless connectivity and be simple and intuitive so that the user experience is positive, right first time and able to move easily between functions
- Be designed to safely and usefully share information, to better support the most vulnerable in our communities, and to target our limited resources more effectively based on demand
- Demonstrate digital leadership, creating the conditions for genuine channel shift
- Rise above traditional ways of working and challenge the status quo to ensure we are working smarter

## 3.2 Digital Platform

3.2.1 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. In order to enable this outcome, it was necessary to procure a digital platform to form the basis of this citizen centred approach.

3.2.2 In March 2020, the digital provider notified Bridgend County Borough Council (BCBC) that they were ceasing to support their platform in March 2021, therefore the Council had to look for an alternative solution.

3.2.3 The COVID-19 pandemic as well as the pending contract expiry in March 2021 of the current platform, along with the lessons learnt from the previous 3 years were the key drivers in assessing the market and procuring a chosen supplier to work with BCBC to develop the digital capabilities over the next 3 years.

Following a G-Cloud procurement exercise that was conducted, which included a demonstration of various solutions, the supplier that was chosen was Granicus.

## 3.3 Councillor Portal

3.3.1 A review was carried out in 2019 on the previous member referral system. Feedback was obtained through an engagement process involving key stakeholders inclusive of Members, Democratic Services and officers. This resulted in 17 recommendations and included issues such as the need to review Service Level Agreements (SLA), development of a system to capture key information, and the requirement for updated member guidelines.

3.3.2 An action plan was developed in line with the Digital Strategy's aims and objectives. The Strategy outlined the actions which included the need to re-engineer the member referral process and to develop an efficient solution.

3.3.3 Following the procurement of Granicus’ digital platform in April 2020, which included the councillor portal, it was decided that the member’s referral process would be revisited.

3.3.4 The Granicus solution enables Members to login into a dedicated portal on the govService platform and submit referrals using a user friendly form. Members are able to track and search live and archived cases. Referrals are logged on a form, accessed via the portal and received and actioned by the relevant service areas via the Staff Portal (Dash).

As well as streamlining the current member referral process, further additional benefits of the councillor portal included:

- Live feeds of the corporate Facebook and Twitter accounts
- Map showing live data for all current and upcoming roadworks
- A direct link to search Planning Applications
- The South Wales area crime map and links to key Police Information

3.3.5 Significant work was undertaken with both Democratic Services and Elected Members to develop the member referral process within the portal, including redesigning the process maps.

3.3.6 Following the initial testing with Democratic Services and Social Services, a pilot group of Members was identified to trial and test the new form and process, ahead of the system going live following the local elections in May 2022.

#### 4. Current situation/proposal

##### 4.1 Digital Platform

4.1.1 The current digital platform was launched at the end of March 2021. To date, 45,605 users have created an online account.

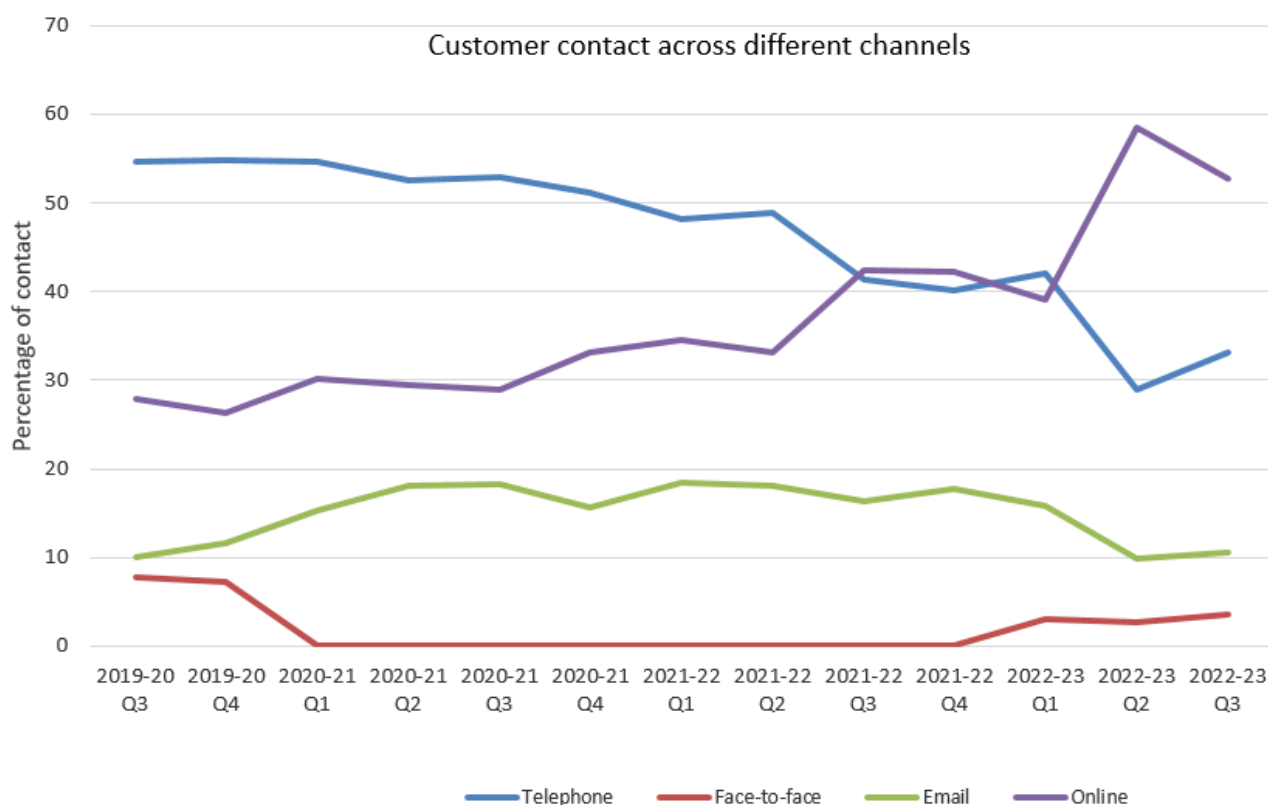
4.1.2 There are **105** forms available via the digital platform. Since May 2022 to February 2023 there have been **89,589** transactions. The table below represents a variety of forms for services and the number of transactions:

Form	Transactions
My Profile (Citizen self service – personal details etc.)	20,503
Welsh Government Fuel Support Scheme	17,874
Cost of living applications	15,804
Contact Us	4,548
Member “Referrals” and “Report It”	4,085
Support Payment for Unpaid Carers	3,552
Pest Control	2,813
Road or Pavement Issue.	2,435
Nursery admission	1,650
Secondary school admission	1,644
Pupil Development Grant 2022-23	1,612
Primary school admission	1,273

Fly-tipping	1,261
Free school meals application	913
Green areas on roads or pavements old	798
Flooding, Drainage and Watercourses	705
Report a damaged or faulty streetlight.	557
Residential parking permit	147
Abandoned Vehicle	131
Memorial bench, plaque or tree	38
<b>Total</b>	<b>82,343</b>

4.1.3 When completing an online form, users are provided the option of rating their experience out of five. To date, the Council has received 13,218 ratings, with an overall average rating of 4.5/5.

4.1.4 Since 2019 there has been a shift in demand across the various contact channels. Whilst the telephone channel has always been the most popular, it is evident from the chart below that since the pandemic, more customers are going online to access Council services.



Since April 2022, the average number of online transactions for some of the key services is shown below:

Service	Average online transactions per month
Council tax payments	2,828
Council tax online transactions	912
Blue badge applications (new and renewals)	169

4.1.5 Despite the growth of the digital channel, the Council has specifically kept all channels open and accessible so as not to exclude any resident from accessing services and therefore mitigating the potential effects of digital exclusion.

4.1.6 The additionality of the digital channel supports a self service / self help opportunity for the residents of Bridgend. This creates a sustainable innovative approach working in collaboration with the residents of the borough making best use of the Council's resources.

## 4.2 Councillor Portal

4.2.1 Ahead of launch of the new member portal, all staff within the various service areas were trained. In total 177 staff were trained in the use of the system and ongoing support is being provided to them as the system continues to be developed.

4.2.2 As at May 2022, 2,000 referrals were still open / unanswered on the previous system, linked to outgoing Councillors. Since launching the new member referral portal in May 2022, there has been aggregate total of 4,085 referrals and "report it" logged on the digital platform. This has been an unprecedented increase in comparison to previous years - for the year 2021/2022, a total of 3,500 referrals were logged by Members.

4.2.3 The tables below outline the position statement for "referrals" and "report it" since May 2022 to February 2023 raised by Councillors.

### "Member Referrals"

Total Referrals	Closed Referrals	Open Referrals with Service
<b>2,553</b>	<b>1,593</b>	<b>960</b>

### "Report it"

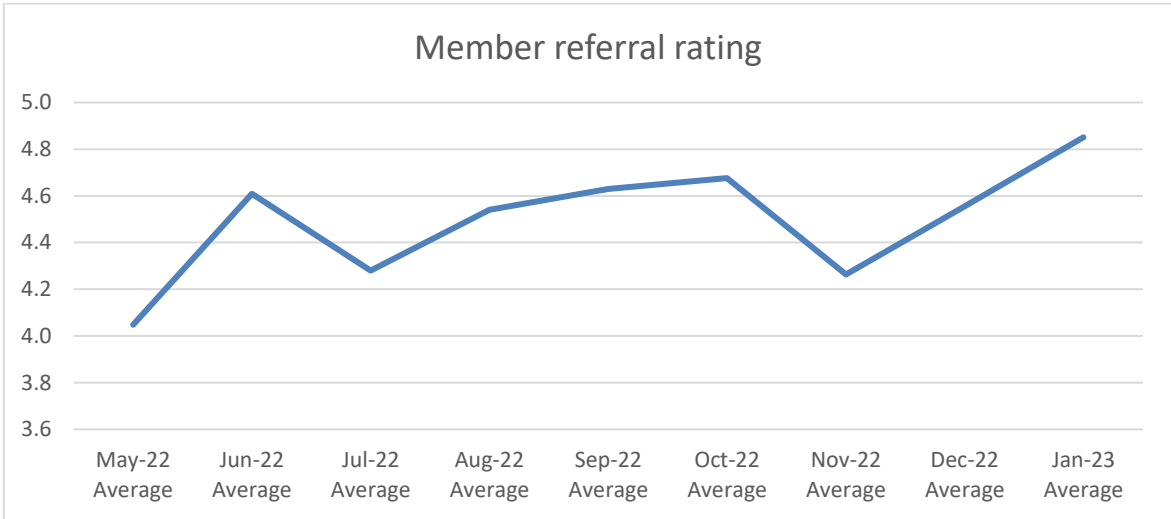
Total "Report it"	Closed "Report it"	Open "Report it"
<b>1,533</b>	<b>1,287</b>	<b>246</b>

4.2.4 When completing an online member referral form, Members are also given the option of rating their experience out of 5. To date, 641 ratings have been received from Members with an overall average rating of 4.5/5.

The table below shows the number of ratings received since May 2022, followed by a chart showing the average rating each month.

Star rating	No. of ratings
☆☆☆☆☆	480
☆☆☆☆	75
☆☆☆	35
☆☆	11

Below is a chart showing the average ratings per month since the new member referral online form has been launched. You will see that when it was launched, the average rating was 4/5 and has risen to 4.9/5 in January 2023.



4.2.5 The launch of the members portal has not been without its challenges against a backdrop of unprecedented demand. These challenges have been around response time for referrals and poor narrative responses from the “report it” function. Development continues to be made to the member portal with regards the narrative for the “report it” function alongside the alignment of capacity within services with a focus on managing the response rate of referrals. This continuous improvement approach for the members portal is focused on a partnership approach with both officers and Members working together. A group is soon to be established consisting of key stakeholders as per the request of the Group Leaders to undertake a review and develop a programme of works to further develop the members portal. There is a commitment from Corporate Management Board (CMB) and services to continually develop and leverage the benefits that the digital platform offers. These efficiencies support the ethos of information availability and self service enabling better use of the Council’s scarce resources.

4.2.6 Utilising the digital platform for both Members and the public to report issues has enabled the Council to review its operational models of work within some service areas. For example, the waste and recycling team embraced the new way of working by using the new system. A new digital system was introduced where operatives were given tablets to receive all fly-tipping, litter, abandoned vehicles and other waste issue reports. This has led to the team working more efficiently, as well as reducing the need to produce paper work tickets and unnecessary administrative tasks. This is a true example of end of end integration based around the digital platform.

## Waste and Recycling team embrace new style of working



**Our waste and recycling team are embracing a new online way of working that not only helps staff work more efficiently but also makes positive contributions to the environment.**

In December 2021, a new system called DASH was brought in which is used for logging service requests made by members of the public to report issues such as fly-tipping, litter, abandoned vehicles and other waste issues.

Jen Sparrow, Cleaner Streets and Waste Contract Manager, said: "The introduction of this system made us look at how efficiently we were dealing with these calls in terms of getting officers to inspect issues and then the resolution of issues such as removal of waste or litter picking of an area.

\*Prior to the DASH system, officers and our operations

would print out jobs, attend site visits and then record the outcome on a paper form. This would then be passed to other staff to close down on the old system.

"After working with many colleagues, we set up a trial which involved Cleaner Streets staff using tablets to access jobs, write feedback, pass on requests to other departments and to also note completed jobs.

"As the trial received positive reviews from staff, we decided to purchase more tablets. The new devices mean that jobs are picked up quicker and dealt with more efficiently."

The switch also helps to reduce the need for unnecessary printing which helps the authority save both time and money as well as contributing to the Council's Net Zero 2030 target.

4.2.7 Currently work is ongoing with regards the member portal alongside engagement with service areas, to enhance the current iteration. Future development of the member portal will include:

- Establishing a Review / Steering Group
- Developing a reporting tool and dashboards
- Exploring the feasibility of integration with Modern.Gov to display all Committee meetings within the portal
- Exploring the feasibility of integrating the Councillor portal with Microsoft Outlook

4.3 Citizen feedback on developing digital services

4.3.1 In the latest 'Shaping Bridgend's Future budget consultation exercise undertaken between 19 December and 22 January 2023, 1,441 interactions were received in total. A total of 747 provided a response in relation to their age with 53% of respondents being aged 55 and over. The split of respondents by age are shown below:

Age category	No. respondents
18-24	7 (1%)
25-34	69 (9%)
35-44	125 (17%)
45-54	146 (19%)
55-64	191 (26%)
65-74	134 (18%)
75+	64 (9%)
Prefer not to say	11 (1%)

As part of the consultation, questions were asked to seek views around the digitalisation of Council services, and the following responses were received:

- Out of a total 1,009 responses 805 respondents (80%) agreed with the ongoing development of online services
- Out of total of 1,009 responses 806 respondents (80%) said they, or someone on their behalf, had accessed online Council services in the past 12 months
- Out of a total of 985 responses 867 respondents (88%) stated they will continue to access services online
- In response to the key benefits of accessing services online:
  - 786 respondents stated it was convenient – ability to access services 24/7/365
  - 498 respondents stated access was quicker and instant
  - 395 respondents stated they preferred self service

4.3.2 These survey results highlight the use made by, and benefit to, our residents. The Council will continue to review work processes and forms to ensure that the public who wish to use this channel are able to access our services and raise issues through the digital platform.

## 5. Effect upon policy framework and procedure rules

5.1 There is no effect upon the policy framework or procedure rules arising from this report.

## 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. 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 below details how this report aligns to one or more of the 5 ways of working and 7 Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act goals:

Involvement	Consultation results have underpinned the residents' need to provide more online services
Long Term	To provide an improved, consistent and sustainable customer experience
Prevention	Developing online solutions and encouraging and promoting self-service will prevent problems from occurring and build a sustainable service. Also by developing digital solutions with front line service needs, prevents future problems and utilises smarter resourcing
Integration	A single entry point into the Council with end-to-end integration to back office systems
Collaboration	Collaborating with Business Managers and key services to enrich the customers experience



A prosperous Wales	Supporting a successful and sustainable economy and smarter use of resources
A resilient Wales	Smarter use of resources
A healthier Wales	Supporting a successful and sustainable economy, helping people and communities to be more healthy and resilient and smarter use of resources
A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language	Supporting a successful and sustainable economy and helping people and communities to be more healthy and resilient
A more equal Wales	Supporting a successful and sustainable economy, helping people and communities to be more healthy and resilient and smarter use of resources
A Wales of Cohesive communities	Supporting a successful and sustainable economy, helping people and communities to be more healthy and resilient and smarter use of resources
A globally responsive Wales	Supporting a successful and sustainable economy and smarter use of resources

## 8. Financial implications

- 8.1 The ongoing annual cost of the digital platform and Councillor portal is shown below and is funded from ICT's core budget:

<b>System</b>	<b>Ongoing annual cost</b>
Forms / Self and Staff portals / Integration Manager / Workflow	£20,500
Single sign-on for Revenues and Benefits	£5,500
Service Designer / Customer Portal / Staff Portal / Payment Connector	£15,500
Service – additional Customer Service Advisor licenses	£6,500
Calendar bookings	£7,000
Systems Polling Service	£5,000
Councillor Portal	£3,500
	<b>£63,500</b>

- 8.2 There will be no initial savings resulting from the implementing of the new digital platform, however there will be potential saving of staff time achieved in individual services areas as the digital channel is further developed and processes streamlined.

## 9. Recommendation

- 9.1 It is recommended that the Democratic Services Committee consider the report with regards the development of the digital platform, including the member portal.

Carys Lord  
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23 February 2023

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**Background documents:**

None