

<b>Meeting of:</b>	<b>CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE</b>
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	<b>24 JULY 2025</b>
<b>Report Title:</b>	<b>DIGITAL STRATEGY 2025-2029</b>
<b>Report Owner / Corporate Director:</b>	<b>CHIEF OFFICER – FINANCE, HOUSING AND CHANGE</b>
<b>Responsible Officer:</b>	<b>PHILIP O'BRIEN GROUP MANAGER – TRANSFORMATION, BUSINESS SUPPORT AND CUSTOMER SERVICES</b>
<b>Policy Framework and Procedure Rules:</b>	<b>There is no impact on the policy framework or procedure rules</b>
<b>Executive Summary:</b>	<b>This report provides an update on the development of the new corporate Digital Strategy 2025-2029</b>

## **1. Purpose of Report**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is provide an update on the development of the corporate Digital Strategy for 2025-2029.

## **2. Background**

- 2.1 The previous Digital Strategy was for the period 2020-2024 and a new Digital Strategy has been developed for 2025-2029 in conjunction with various key officers throughout the organisation and in line with the new Corporate Plan.
- 2.2 The key aim of the Strategy is to continue to improve and modernise service delivery, responding positively to opportunities, expectations and challenges posed by the ever-changing digital marketplace.
- 2.3 The draft Digital Strategy was reviewed by Corporate Management Board (CMB) in March 2025, and by Cabinet at the end of April 2025.
- 2.4 The draft Digital Strategy was updated following feedback from CMB and Cabinet, and the updated version was circulated to the Digital Transformation Board members in May 2025, requesting feedback.
- 2.5 A public consultation exercise was undertaken over a six week period from 2<sup>nd</sup> June to 13<sup>th</sup> July 2025. Respondents were asked to share their views on the proposed principles and digital developments including:

- Digital Citizen principle
  - Develop more online council services
  - Consult with citizens on how current processes can be adapted, aided by technology
  - Continue to upskill our citizens' digital skills in the use of technology
  - Explore assistive technology opportunities to improve citizens' wellbeing and safety in their homes
  - Explore Artificial Intelligence opportunities initially around social care to improve service delivery
  - Produce self-serve facilities for citizens across the county borough
- Digital Council principle
  - Review business processes to improve service delivery and reducing costs
  - Provide hand-held technology to frontline staff allowing real time updating of information
  - Explore further automation opportunities to reduce repetitive administrative tasks
  - Roll out further internal self-serve functions to managers and employees in relation to HR and payroll
  - Upskill staff on digital tools and cybersecurity protocols
  - Investigate and develop full integration with back-office systems where possible to help manage data more efficiently
  - Continue to work with schools to ensure technology is a tool for education and not a barrier
  - Investigate the integration of key social care and health systems to enhance integrated working with partners

2.6 A wide variety of communication methods were used including surveys, social media, and email bulletins to both residents and Citizen Panel members. Arrangements were also put in place with Awen staff in local libraries to support those citizens wishing to participate with the consultation and were not able to go online. Accessible versions of the survey were also available upon request. A link was also added to the MyAccount homepage to encourage those residents logging in online to participate in the consultation.

2.7 The public consultation was included in three weekly govDelivery residents bulletins, two stand-alone bulletins to residents and Citizen Panel members, and three bulletins to Members during the live period. govDelivery is a digital communications tool that was introduced by the local authority in June 2020 to issue council updates directly to residents' email inboxes in the language of their choice. There are currently 33,327 English language subscribers and 381 Welsh language subscribers to the weekly resident's update email. Overall, govDelivery generated 524 link clicks through to the consultation survey.

### 3. **Current situation/ proposal**

3.1 The attached consultation report (**Appendix A**) sets out in detail the views expressed by those who participated.

3.2 Overall the consultation received 560 interactions (likes/share/comments and link clicks) from a combination of bulletins, social media engagement and via the authority's Citizens' Panel.

3.3 The response rate, by method of interaction is set out below:

Promotion	Total views	Link clicks
Residents' bulletins	60,054	124
Standalone bulletin	15,916	262
Citizen Panel bulletin	963	137
Members' bulletins	294	1

Promotion – Social media	Total views	Likes / shares / comments	Link clicks
Facebook	3,881	6	16
X (Twitter)	1,386	5	0
Instagram	662	4	0
LinkedIn	422	5	0

- 250 responses to the surveys were received in total.
- A total of 36 interactions were received via social media, including 5 social media comments.

3.4 Headline figures and themes include:

3.4.1 Digital Citizen principal:

- 201 respondents (82.4%) agreed with this principle
- 149 respondents (60.8%) agreed that more online council services should be developed. 22.4% of respondents provided a neutral response.
- 203 respondents (83.2%) agreed that citizens should be consulted on how current processes can be adapted, aided by technology.
- 189 respondents (77.8%) agreed that citizens should have their digital skills improved in the use of technology.
- 179 respondents (73.4%) agreed that assistive technology opportunities should be explored to improve citizen's wellbeing and safety in their own homes.
- 98 respondents (40.5%) agreed that Artificial Intelligence opportunities should be explored initially around social care to improve service delivery. 31.5% of respondents disagreed.
- 170 respondents (70.5%) agreed that self-serve facilities should be provided for citizens across the county borough. 18.3% of respondents provided a neutral response.

Respondents were asked if there were any other key developments they thought should be considered as part of the Digital Citizen principle. 55 responses were received and whilst it hasn't be possible to review these responses in time to produce this report, all responses will be reviewed and taken into consideration as part of the Strategy development.

### 3.4.2 Digital Council principal:

- 83.8% of respondents agreed with this principle
- 196 respondents (80.3%) agreed that business processes should be reviewed to improve service delivery, reducing print and postage costs
- 202 respondents (82.8%) agreed that appropriate hand-held technology should be provided to frontline staff allowing real time updating of information
- 190 respondents (78.5%) agreed that further automation opportunities should be explored, reducing repetitive administrative tasks
- 151 respondents (61.9%) agreed that further internal self-serve functions should be rolled out to managers and employees in relation to HR and payroll
- 205 respondents (84.4%) agreed that staff should be upskilled on digital tools and cybersecurity protocols
- 200 respondents (82.3%) agreed that full integration with back-office systems should be investigated to help manage data more efficiently
- 209 respondents (86.0%) agreed that work should continue with schools to ensure technology is a tool for education and not a barrier
- 186 respondents (76.2%) agreed that key social care and health systems should be investigated to enhance integrated working with partners

Respondents were asked if there were any other key developments they thought should be considered as part of the Digital Citizen principle. 55 responses were received and whilst it hasn't been possible to review these responses in time to produce this report, all responses will be reviewed and taken into consideration as part of the Strategy development.

- 3.5 Following the public consultation and formal approval of the Digital Strategy, further work will be undertaken to develop a delivery plan to underpin the new Strategy. The delivery plan will identify the short, medium and long-term resource implications of delivering it, together with any intended savings.

## 4. **Equality implications (including Socio-economic Duty and Welsh Language)**

- 4.1 An initial Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) screening has identified that there would be no negative impact on those with one or more of the protected characteristics, on socio-economic disadvantage or the use of the Welsh Language. It is therefore not necessary to carry out a full EIA on this policy or proposal.

## 5. **Well-being of Future Generations implications and connection to Corporate Well-being Objectives**

- 5.1 The well-being goals identified in the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 were considered in the preparation of this report. The monitoring of corporate complaints and the successful resolution of those complaints is consistent with the five ways of working within the Act as it supports the provision of high quality and more effective services to the public across all service areas. In addition, it enables each service to focus on areas of concern, to improve services and to monitor performance, ensure that any trends are identified and dealt with to be avoided in the future and to ensure that complaints are dealt with consistently and fairly across all service areas. By managing complaints effectively through to successful resolution, this assists in the achievement of the following corporate well-being objectives:

- A County Borough where we protect our most vulnerable
- A County Borough where we help people meet their potential
- A County Borough where people feel valued, heard and part of their community
- A County Borough where we support people to live healthy and happy lives

## **6. Climate Change and Nature Implications**

6.1 There are no direct implications arising from this report.

## **7. Safeguarding and Corporate Parent Implications**

7.1 There are no direct implications arising from this report.

## **8. Financial Implications**

8.1 The Digital Transformation Board oversees and agrees the allocation of funding from a specific earmarked reserve to digital transformation projects. At the start of the 2025-26 financial year, there was a balance of £442,725 on this reserve. However, this is fully committed to the employment of customer experience and improvement officers, a business analyst and software costs in 2025-26.

8.2 At the end of 2024-25 an existing earmarked reserve for transformation and change was increased by £1.5 million to support the wider transformation agenda going forward, including digital transformation, so any additional financial implications of delivering the Digital Strategy will need to be funded from this earmarked reserve.

## **9. Recommendation(s)**

9.1 Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee is recommended to note the content of this report prior to Cabinet approval.

## **Background documents**

Survey response report – public consultation