

**AUDIT COMMITTEE  
08 APRIL 2024**

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**ICT STRATEGY – IMPLEMENTATION PROGRESS REPORT**

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**SUMMARY REPORT**

**Purpose of the Report**

1. The Chief Officer's Board (COB) is required to report six-monthly to the Audit Committee on progress in relation to the implementation of the ICT Strategy.

**Summary**

2. The revised ICT Strategy focusses on three strategic priorities:
  - (a) ICT Governance and Service Development
  - (b) ICT Strategic Architecture
  - (c) Council Service Development and Transformation
3. This report summarises progress on the main activities within each of these priorities.

**Recommendation**

4. It is recommended that progress on the implementation of the ICT Strategy be noted.

**Reasons**

5. The recommendation is supported to provide the Audit Committee with evidence to reflect on progress in delivery of the Council's ICT Strategy.

**Andy Evans  
Head of ICT Services – Xentrall Shared Services**

**Background Papers**

Darlington ICT Strategy 2022

AndyEvans - Extension 528472

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| S17 Crime and Disorder                           | There is no specific crime and disorder impact.   |
| Health and Well Being                            | There is no specific health and well-being impact.  |
| Carbon Impact and Climate Change                 | Some of the initiatives contained within ICT Strategy will help contribute towards the carbon reduction commitments.  |
| Diversity  | There is no specific diversity impact.  |
| Wards Affected                                   | All wards are affected equally.   |
| Groups Affected                                  | All groups are affected equally.  |
| Budget and Policy Framework                      | Financial implications will be considered in the Medium-Term Financial Plan. This report does not affect the policy framework.  |
| Key Decision                                     | This is not a key decision.   |
| Urgent Decision                                  | This is not an urgent decision.   |
| Council Plan                                     | The ICT strategy supports the business of the Council in delivering the Council Plan  |
| Efficiency                                       | There will be efficiency savings generated as a result of implementing the ICT Strategy. The introduction of new technology is key to providing efficiency savings within Council services. |
| Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers | This report has no impact on Looked After Children or Care Leavers  |

## MAIN REPORT

6. Progress on the three strategic themes of the ICT Strategy is described below.

### ICT Governance and ICT Service Development

7. The Systems and Information Governance Group (which is the Chief Officers Board of Assistant Directors but chaired by the Group Director of Operations) undertakes an ICT Strategy monitoring role as well as overseeing and approving the ICT Work Plan, which covers all service based and corporate ICT projects. As well as this forum, updates on major ICT projects are also given to the Group Director of Operations and to the meetings of the Xentrall Executive Board on which she sits.
8. During this six-month reporting period, ICT have worked towards the renewal of the annual PSN (Public Service Network) certification. Our submission is currently being assessed by the Cabinet Office compliance team and we expect to be successful in our recertification in the coming weeks. This will be formally noted in the next reporting period. Preparations are also underway for the successor to PSN, a new framework called CAF (Cyber Assessment Framework). In advance of a formal launch date ICT will continue to engage with the Cabinet Office to ensure the Council is able to meet the requirements of this new standard.
9. Working with the Councils Internal Audit team seventeen separate audit controls have been reviewed during this reporting period. All have been classified as "green" on a red/amber/green rating system. They include an assessment of ICT Project Management documentation, a security review of our Firewall posture and security patching for ICT systems.
10. In terms of ICT service development and related to the two ISO certifications and internal audits, all ICT service improvement activities are identified in the ICT Service Improvement Programme, and this continues to be managed and monitored by the ICT Management Team, supported by the ICT Security & Process Excellence Officer. This group reviews the progress and priorities of this extensive and continual programme which is resourced through a combination of business-as-usual activities and planned projects within ICT. Many of these activities relate to internal ICT procedures and standards which ultimately deliver improvements to the services ICT users receive.
11. One of the ways ICT are helping to reduce the risk of a cyber incident is by working with the Information Governance Team to deliver regular Phishing email simulation exercises and a strengthened approach to communications. The most recent exercise was completed in February 2024. The findings will be passed to the Information Governance Team which in turn will inform user education and communication.

### ICT Strategic Architecture

12. ICT continues to ensure high levels of system availability, reliability, and security through the delivery of major project work. Notable deliverables include:
  - (a) The refresh of the Councils Wide Area Network (WAN) has commenced with the signing of a new agreement which will introduce new technology, faster connectivity, and a reduced contract price. In addition to underpinning the strategic aims of the Council such

as Blended Working, the new solution is expected to deliver financial savings contributing to the MTFP during the term of the new contract.

- (b) During this reporting period ICT have worked at pace to refresh and replace key technology platforms such as the Darlington Firewall and the virtual server infrastructure which deliver key line of business applications such as Social Care, Finance and Revenues and benefits. As well as improving security and performance this work underpins the aim of maintaining high levels of application availability and resilience.
- (c) To ensure that the Internet can meet the strategic demands of the Council such as Blended Working and the continued adoption of cloud applications, ICT has procured and installed new Internet Connections, ten times faster than current connections whilst supporting the MTFP with savings when compared to the operating costs of the existing contract. Work is in progress to finalise the configuration of the new links and they will be made available to our users at the end of May.

### **Council Service Development and Transformation**

13. The service-based Information & Systems Strategies inform the ICT Work Plan, and this drives customer projects within the ICT service. As well as the management and monitoring of individual projects, the overall ICT Work Plan is monitored on a monthly cycle at the Systems and Information Governance Group (SIGG is described in paragraph 7 above). These ICT projects underpin many of the Council's business change activities. SIGG also reviews the Web Team Workplan and the Systems and Process Team Workplan and thereby has a whole view of ICT-related activities across the Council.
14. As well as some of the central ICT architecture projects listed above, six additional Darlington specific projects have been completed since the last progress report to this committee including the support of the public access ICT requirement at the refurbished Crown Street Library and the Housing Allocations platform. Some other Darlington projects currently underway include:
  - a) Supporting the procurement and implementation of a new ticketing and point of sale system for the Darlington Railway and Heritage Quarter.
  - b) Undertaking an internal development to migrate the Cemetery & Crematorium team to a modern web-based system that will improve processes with customers and funeral directors.
15. As part of the Microsoft Office 365 roll-out and the features this brings, ICT have continued to work with a task group and different services across the Council to migrate their shared data to Teams. Services already migrated are able to work more collaboratively when developing and sharing documents. Functional as well as structural teams are also deployed, and these are used for project and group work.
16. Xentrall ICT also continue to support the Council's Blended Working programme.

### **Outcome of Consultation**

17. There has been no formal consultation in the preparation of this report.