

AUDIT COMMITTEE
14 SEPT 2024

ICT STRATEGY – IMPLEMENTATION PROGRESS REPORT

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

Andy Evans - Extension 528472

Council Plan	The ICT Strategy supports the business of the Council Plan by ensuring appropriate ICT systems are available, reliable and secure.
Addressing inequalities	There is no specific impact on addressing inequalities.
Tackling Climate Change	Initiatives contained within ICT Strategy will help contribute towards the carbon reduction commitments.
Efficient and effective use of resources	Efficiency savings will be generated through the implementation of the ICT Strategy. The introduction of new technology is key to the delivery of savings within Council services.
Health and Wellbeing	There is no specific Health and Wellbeing impact.
S17 Crime and Disorder	There is no specific crime and disorder 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.
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 within the reporting period 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 Executive Director - Resources and Governance) 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 Executive Director - Resources and Governance and to the meetings of the Xentrall Executive Board on which she sits.
8. ICT have been awarded PSN (Public Service Network) certification by the Cabinet Office for the current financial year and work is already under way to prepare the 25/26 submission. The external penetration test of the Darlington network by an approved assessor is complete and ICT are working through recommended remediations and updating technical documentation. Xentrall ICT are also working with Central government on CAF (Cyber Assessment Framework). Whilst yet to be launched by the Government, Darlington will be one of the first Councils in the country to adopt this new cyber security standard.
9. Working closely with the Councils Internal Audit team twelve 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 Data Centre and Infrastructure Security as well as a review of ICT's approach to considering and responding to Cyber Security threats.
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. As part of the annual recertification work ICT have successfully retained both ISO 90001 (Quality Management Systems) and 27001 (Information Security Management) standards.
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 June 2024. The findings have been passed to Information Governance who will use them to inform the approach to user education and communication. In additional security controls that filter malicious emails coming into the organisation have been reviewed and strengthened.
12. A revised user onboarding process was launched within FreshService, the ICT call logging portal. This improved process consolidates the various separate requests for ICT hardware and software into one online form. This paves the way for further development and the end goal of a fully automated starter process for new Council staff.

ICT Strategic Architecture

13. 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) is now well underway with all site surveys for Darlington complete. Dates are being arranged to install the new faster fibre circuits which will introduce new technology, faster connectivity, and a reduced contract price.
 - (b) The planned upgrade to the Councils main Internet connection is now complete with capacity increased by tenfold. This work was completed out of hours and whilst potentially disruptive, ICT worked with services such as CCTV, the Emergency Duty Team, Red Care Services and leisure sites taking cash to ensure minimum impact.
 - (c) 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 is critical in maintaining high levels of application availability and resilience.
 - (d) Refresh of the Councils Network Infrastructure. In parallel with the upgrade to the wide area network connections ICT have also commenced a project to replace and upgrade the network hardware across the Darlington, starting with the Town Hall and then moving on to the 19 satellite offices sites across Darlington.

Council Service Development and Transformation

14. 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 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.
15. As well as some of the central ICT architecture projects listed above, five additional Darlington specific projects have been completed since the last progress report to this committee including significant updates to payment processing and online booking for leisure services and supporting the implementation of a new housing allocations service. Other examples of projects and major milestones include:
 - a) The launch of the Hoptown Rail and Engineering experience on the 16th of July. The scope of the ICT work encompassed the design and installation of the Councils largest Wi-Fi network to date. As well as the implementation of new point of sale and ticketing systems. ICT provided onsite supporting at the opening event on the 16th as well as out of hours support for the first full weekend of opening ensuring the best customer experience possible.

- b) Final testing stages of an internal development to migrate the Cemetery & Crematorium team to a modern web-based system that will improve processes with customers and funeral directors.
 - c) Provided ICT support for the Police & Crime Commissioner, Local Councillor and General Elections. Supporting Democratic Services, configuring and testing devices and applications required to facilitate the count, working through the night to ensure support was on hand if required.
16. 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 can 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.

Outcome of Consultation

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