

AUDIT COMMITTEE
30 APRIL 2025

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.

Reason

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. Darlington Council has been awarded PSN (Public Service Network) certification by the Cabinet Office for the next financial year 25/26 and work is already under way to prepare the 26/27 submission. The external penetration test of the Darlington network by an approved assessor is scheduled and once complete ICT will work through the recommendations. Xentrall ICT have also taken part in the MHCLG testing of the new CAF (Cyber Assessment Framework) which aims to document the interdependencies of key line of business applications helping to improve security and resilience. Darlington Council successfully completed the "Get CAF Ready" Programme in January 2025 and are now an early adopter of this new cyber security standard.
9. As well as the external programme of assessment, ICT continues to work closely with the Councils Internal Audit team. Several new audit controls have been reviewed during this reporting period including the ICT Change Control process, ICT Health checks and a review of the Cyber Security posture. All have been classified as "green" on a red/amber/green rating system.
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. ICT continue to work with the Information Governance Team to deliver regular Phishing email simulation exercises designed to educate and raise awareness of the dangers posed by malicious email campaigns. Two further exercises were completed in this reporting period. The findings have been passed to Information Governance who will use them to refine the approach to user education and communication. Security controls that filter malicious emails coming into the organisation continue to be reviewed and strengthened.
12. One of the greatest cyber threats to the Council currently is that of a supply chain attack, an attack against ICT system providers who may indirectly manage or handle critical data. In order to mitigate this threat, ICT have introduced a new product Risk Ledger. This system

will help to identify and manage the risks posed by the suppliers of third-party software applications to the Council by continuously reviewing their cyber security posture and associated accreditations.

13. As part of the assessment of the current ICT landscape as well as the development of Council strategies such as Digital, the Xentrall ICT Strategy 2020 -2024 is currently under review. A new version which will support the business objectives of the Council over the next few years will be published in June 2025.

ICT Strategic Architecture

14. 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 WAN (Wide Area Network) is now complete, with new faster and more reliable fibre connectivity delivered to the 19 remote or satellite sites across the town. These new circuits will deliver significant savings as well as providing the Council with a platform to deliver new and innovative services to residents.
 - (b) Following swiftly on from the WAN project, the next stage of the network upgrade has already commenced. A new project will refresh hardware across all sites including the Town Hall. This project is expected to take 18-24 months to deliver and once complete it will enhance the reliability of the network, improve security and deliver improved Wi-Fi Services, supporting the continued development of the Councils Digital Strategy. The first major milestone in this project, the replacement of the Core Switch infrastructure within the Darlington Town Hall will be completed by the end of March 2025.
 - (c) During this reporting period ICT have worked at pace to refresh and replace key technology platforms such as the corporate VPN (Virtual Private network) which securely manages external access to Council applications e.g. Agresso Finance for schools. The Netcall Call Centre solution has also recently been refreshed and moved on to the Councils virtual server platform. This work removes the need for future investment in physical server hardware and improves availability and reliability for what is a vital point of contact for residents across Darlington.
 - (d) In order to ensure users benefit from the most update and secure operating system ICT has completed the migration project to move all of our 1700 users from Windows 10 to Windows 11. This work took 12 months and involved extensive testing to ensure the line of business applications used across Darlington continue to work reducing the impact and potential downtime for our users. This work was complete at the end of March 2025 well in advance of the end-of-life deadline of October 2025. After which Windows 10 will no longer be supported by Microsoft.

Council Service Development and Transformation

15. The service-based Information & Systems Strategies including the recently launched Digital Darlington Strategy 2025-30 inform the ICT Work Plan, this in turn 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.

16. As well as some of the central ICT architecture projects listed above, twelve additional Darlington specific projects have been completed since the last progress report to this committee including the completion and closure of the Hopetown Darlington ICT project. Other examples of projects and major milestones include:
 - a) The completion and closure of the Council CRM platform with new servers, environments and reporting systems.
 - b) Enablement of school transport staff with mobile ICT facilities.
17. Xentrall ICT continue to work closely with The System Strategy and Development Team to support the roll out of Microsoft Teams across all Services. Most recently Housing (including Lifeline) have been moved into Teams and work is progressing at pace with the next data migrations involving Social Care, both Adults and Children's. Once across to Teams there are additional benefits the Council can leverage in terms of Data Governance and Security.
18. Following the launch of the new Digital Strategy the Systems Team have commenced a proof of concept to understand the potential benefits of AI transcription tools such as Minute, Magic Notes. ICT are supporting the evaluation process and the development of a business case.

Outcome of Consultation

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