

**AUDIT COMMITTEE**

**30 April 2025**

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**INFORMATION GOVERNANCE PROGRAMME PROGRESS REPORT**

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**SUMMARY REPORT**

**Purpose of the Report**

1. The Systems and Information Governance Group (SIGG) is required to report six monthly to the Audit Committee on progress and planned developments of the information governance programme.

**Summary**

2. The ongoing delivery of our information governance programme continues to provide the assurance required to reduce our information risks to an acceptable level.
3. Recent/Ongoing work includes:
  - (a) The Microsoft Office 365 Programme.
  - (b) Digital Darlington Strategy and Artificial Intelligence (AI).
  - (c) ICT work plan.
  - (d) Web Team work plan.
  - (e) Systems and Process Team work plan.
  - (f) Information Governance Team Work Plan.
  - (g) Work to achieve our target for the completion of on-line mandatory information governance training courses.
4. The area of highest priority in the information governance programme is:
  - (a) The Microsoft Office 365 Programme.

**Recommendation**

5. It is recommended that progress on the implementation of the Information Governance Programme be noted.

**Reasons**

6. To provide the Audit Committee with a status report on the delivery of the Council's Information Governance Programme.

**Elizabeth Davison**  
**Group Director of Operations**

Lee Downey, Complaints & Information Governance Manager: Extension 5451

## Background Papers

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|--|--|
| S17 Crime and Disorder                           | This report is for information to members and requires no decision. Therefore there are no issues in relation to Crime and Disorder.               |
| Health and Well Being                            | This report is for information to members and requires no decision. Therefore there are no issues in relation to Health and Well Being.            |
| Carbon Impact and Climate Change                 | This report is for information to members and requires no decision. Therefore there are no issues in relation to Carbon Impact and Climate Change. |
| Diversity  | This report is for information to members and requires no decision. Therefore there are no issues in relation to Diversity.                        |
| Wards Affected                                   | This report affects all wards equally.   |
| Groups Affected                                  | This report is for information to members and requires no decision. Therefore there is no impact on any particular group.                          |
| Budget and Policy Framework                      | This report does not recommend any changes to the Budget or Policy Framework   |
| Key Decision                                     | This is not a key decision.  |
| Urgent Decision                                  | This is not an Urgent Decision.  |
| Council Plan                                     | There is no specific relevance to the strategy beyond a reflection on the Council's governance arrangements.                                       |
| Efficiency                                       | Implementation of effective information governance systems and procedures has a positive impact on efficiency.                                     |
| Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers | There is no specific impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers.   |

## MAIN REPORT

### Background

7. Delivery of our information governance programme has provided the assurance required to reduce our information risks to an acceptable level. While that is the case it must be recognised that the data processing activities of the Council continually evolve and must be kept under review. The processes implemented by the Council include review mechanisms to ensure this takes place.

### The Microsoft Office 365 Programme

8. The Microsoft Office 365 Programme Team is comprised of the Systems Strategy and Development Manager, the Complaints and Information Governance Manager, the ICT Solutions Architects and the ICT Security and Assurance Team Leader and the End User Engagement Team and reports to SIGG. We have also recently recruited a Systems and Process Officer (SPO) who will assist the above team in driving this forward.
9. Following the successful migration of services who volunteered to migrate to Microsoft 365, we now have a significant number of teams who are fully operational through a Microsoft (MS) Teams interface. However, there remains a significant piece of work to do to and over the coming months we intend to migrate the rest of the Council's services to Microsoft 365. This work will be carried out by the new SPO who will be meeting with services to enable a smooth transfer into the new 365 world.
10. In addition to the services now using MS Teams as their primary working area, there are several Functional and Project Teams being used to conduct business across the Local Authority, including with partners. We have recently decommissioned the secure file sharing system, Egress. We are now providing that functionality via MS Teams, saving on license costs.
11. It is vital all Council services are migrated to Microsoft 365, to enable officers to collaborate remotely, work in innovative ways and utilise the plethora of applications within Microsoft 365 to improve productivity. The need to migrate services to Microsoft 365 is also becoming increasingly necessary from an information security perspective and as we start to explore the potential use of Microsoft Co-pilot, Microsoft's AI tool.

### Digital Darlington Strategy and Artificial Intelligence (AI)

12. The Digital Darlington Strategy 2025-30 was approved by Cabinet on 4 March 2025. It is based on four themes, with progress against the strategy regularly reported to the Systems and Information Governance Group. The four themes are:
  - (a) Customer focused;
  - (b) Digital exclusion;
  - (c) Encourage the adoption of digital channels; and
  - (d) Maximising the benefits of existing ICT systems and explore, assess, and implement emerging technologies.
13. The fourth theme includes the assessment and where appropriate implementation of artificial intelligence (AI) to help the council be more efficient and productive. A report on progress to date

was presented to the Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee on 3 April 2025. A key highlight from the report is the ambition to establish an AI strategy for Darlington Borough Council. Although work to develop the strategy has already started, so have other complementary activities. These include:

- (a) three existing staff started level 4 apprenticeships that focus on AI;
  - (b) work has started to develop governance around the Council's use of AI;
  - (c) the Council is a member of the Local Government Association (LGA) AI Practitioners network, which helps officers develop knowledge;
  - (d) MS Co-pilot is being tested to understand the opportunities it could bring to the Council;
  - (e) A successful application was submitted to be part of a pilot for a Government developed AI tool called MINUTE; and
  - (f) We are awaiting the outcome of an external funding bid to pay for a licence for Magic Notes which is a commercially developed AI tool use across the social care sector.
14. It is understood the Council will need to invest in staff training and development in order for the benefits of AI tools to be maximised once deployed.

### **ICT work plan**

15. SIGG also oversees the Council's ICT work programme, a summary of which is contained in the ICT Strategy - Implementation Progress report to Audit Committee.

### **Web Team work plan**

16. Work on the [darlington.gov.uk](https://darlington.gov.uk) migration is now entering its final stages and is expected to be completed this summer. This will complete phase 1 of the migration which covers all the public facing features. Phase 2 which looks at the backend features used by the Web Team for maintenance will start in early 2026 once the next long term support version of Umbraco is available to develop against.
17. Work is expected to start on the new Darlington Hippodrome website in the summer once the upgraded [darlington.gov.uk](https://darlington.gov.uk) website has launched.

### **Systems and Process Team work plan**

18. The Systems and Process Team are the custodians of the large corporate applications that administer the Council's business across Social Care, Education, Customer Services, all online payments, Waste Management, Building Services, Street Cleansing, Planning, Anti-Social Behaviour, Building Control, Trading Standards and Licensing. The work plan covers all major upgrades to these systems (including the intensive testing regime needed to support this).
19. The team are working in Adult Services to align the Transformation Team Programme with the System Programme, a new program of works has been drawn up and we are slowly working through each item. Ongoing work also includes looking at a system to digitalise care records within the reablement team and Holicote. Grants have been received to fund 50% of the cost within the first year. We are also carrying out research into portals which are available to the service to enable more streamlined delivery of services between us and 3<sup>rd</sup> parties.

20. Children's Services work continues with the main focus still being on Fostering. The team are working closely with the transformation programme manager to implement more streamline services when working with carers. The new payment scheme has been implemented for our foster carers, and the system also underwent a major upgrade in October 2024, which brought in a number of enhancements.
21. The Education system is now part of a much wider programme that will see it wholly replaced in 2025. Stage one of the Education system is now live alongside two out of four portals – Admissions and Establishment. The 3<sup>rd</sup> portal which will enable parents to apply for an Education Health Care (EHC) Plan for their child was due to soft launch with four school/nurseries in September 2024, however this has been delayed due to a system issue. Stage two was due to commence in 2024, however, this has been rescheduled to 2025 due to System C re-designing their finance module. This is an integral part of this stage and is yet to be released to customers, meaning there could be further delays. This is being monitored and factored in. School admission applications opened for the second time using the new system in September 2024 and saw a large influx of applications on its first day of opening.
22. The development of the Customer Strategy is supported by the Verint work programme (Verint is the Councils CRM System) where forms are developed to allow a seamless digital interaction for the customer and a safe and secure payment option. Additional services will continue to come on board with an online form offering, this is a project where we continue to work with those that want to offer an online form option as well as continuous promotion of existing forms to increase a higher digital presence. Verint underwent a major upgrade in April which has brought us up to date and inline with their upgrade path.
23. Over the coming months, we will be updating our mapping programme and tools, this is a large scale project which will see the Systems Team working with services to ensure that the layers used are updated and migrated over to the new platform successfully prior to us moving over to the pro version of the product.

#### **Information Governance Team Work Plan**

24. The Council's Complaints and Information Governance Team/The Data Protection Officer continues to provide advice to officers on a range of data protection and information rights matters and ensures information rights requests are handled in accordance with UK General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR); The Data Protection Act 2018; The Freedom of Information Act 2000; and The Environmental Information Regulations 2014.
25. The team handles all data breaches in accordance with UK GDPR and has been working with Xentrall to run a regular phishing exercises to assess the awareness of users about the dangers of phishing emails and to assess the results to see what, if any, additional actions may be required such as regular reminders or additional training. The team has ran series of communications aimed at raising awareness of phishing scams and how to spot them. More recently the team has worked with Xentrall ICT and the Systems and Process Team to raise awareness of the risk cyber security threats pose and improve the Council's overall preparedness for a cyber attack.
26. Since the last report to Audit Committee the team has also advised on a number of contracts including, Translation Services Agreement and the Section 75 Agreement - North East and North Cumbria ICB; a number of data protection impact assessments (DPIAs) including, North East Childrens Complex Care Diagnostic, Public Health – Stop Smoking Service and Shop Watch What's

App Group; and a number of data sharing agreements including, the VMO2 – Digital Switchover Programme, Choices Together programme - North East Raising Aspiration Partnership (NERAP) and NFI Housing Tenancy Pilot - SIRA Agreement.

### **Training and awareness**

27. The revised table in Appendix 1 shows the position on 14 April 2025 regarding the completion of the mandatory on-line information governance courses for Academy 10 and where applicable, non-IT users. Completion rates of over 95% remains the Council's target and represents an acceptable level of take up which must be achieved. Since last reported over 150 people have moved onto Academy 10, 70 in the last month. This has impacted on our completion rates in the short term, however long term, this should have a positive effect.
28. The overall completion rate for the Employee's Guide to Information Security currently stands at 82%, a reduction from the 89% reported to October's Audit Committee, the reduction in part is associated with the additional Academy 10 users. This course is subject to a two year renewal, the course is not applicable to non-IT users.
29. In relation to the Social Media Module, completion rates currently stand at 78% overall, 88% for Academy 10 users and 37% for non-IT users. This compares to the 78% reported to October's Audit Committee.
30. In relation to the Data Protection Act (DPA) 2018, overall completion rates are at 78%, 86% for Academy 10 users and 43% for non-IT users. This compares to the 76% overall completion rate, reported to April's Audit Committee.
31. While a significant number of officers have undertaken this training previously, following the introduction of two year expiry period to all three modules, they are now required to complete it again. As notifications are sent to those officers who need to refresh their training we anticipate an upturn in completion rates. This is done directly via reminder e-mails sent from Academy 10 and the weekly staff Briefing. With regards to completion rates for non-IT users, the simplified tool box talk style modules are still being used for Social Media and Data Protection. These modules are also subject to the 2 year renewals, but have been designed for managers to be able to deliver the sessions faster, while still imparting all the key information with reinforced learning at the end of the sessions. We will continue to promote the use of Academy 10 in these areas.

### **Conclusion**

32. The Council's information governance programme continues to address emerging issues, support compliance with data protection legislation and manage the Council's information risks to an acceptable level.

### **Outcome of Consultation**

33. No formal consultation was undertaken in production of this report.

| 15/04/2025  | Staff<br>included | % Completion Rate  |  |                         |
|---|-------------------|--|--|-------------------------|
|   |                   | Employee Guide<br>to Information<br>Security not<br>applicable to<br>hard copy | Social Media<br>Version 3 - New<br>in 2020 | Data Protection<br>2018 |
| <b>Chief Executives &amp; Economic Growth Total</b> | <b>76</b>         | <b>89</b>  | <b>92</b>                                  | <b>92</b>               |
| <b>Darlington Partnership</b>                       | <b>3</b>          | <b>100</b>   | <b>100</b>                                 | <b>100</b>              |
| <b>Economic Growth</b>                              | <b>72</b>         | <b>89</b>  | <b>92</b>                                  | <b>92</b>               |
| <b>Operations Group Total</b>                       | <b>450</b>        | <b>86</b>  | <b>96</b>                                  | <b>96</b>               |
| <b>Housing and Revenues</b>                         | <b>278</b>        | <b>85</b>  | <b>95</b>                                  | <b>95</b>               |
| <b>Law &amp; Governance</b>                         | <b>72</b>         | <b>88</b>  | <b>97</b>                                  | <b>99</b>               |
| <b>Resources</b>                                    | <b>62</b>         | <b>90</b>  | <b>97</b>                                  | <b>100</b>              |
| <b>Strategy Performance and Communications</b>      | <b>37</b>         | <b>89</b>  | <b>97</b>                                  | <b>97</b>               |
| <b>People Group Total</b>                           | <b>753</b>        | <b>79</b>  | <b>86</b>                                  | <b>83</b>               |
| <b>Adult Social Care</b>                            | <b>197</b>        | <b>83</b>  | <b>92</b>                                  | <b>89</b>               |
| <b>Children's Services</b>                          | <b>300</b>        | <b>79</b>  | <b>91</b>                                  | <b>84</b>               |
| <b>Commissioning Performance&amp;Transformation</b> | <b>103</b>        | <b>92</b>  | <b>95</b>                                  | <b>90</b>               |
| <b>Education</b>                                    | <b>196</b>        | <b>68</b>  | <b>68</b>                                  | <b>68</b>               |
| <b>Public Health</b>                                | <b>15</b>         | <b>87</b>  | <b>93</b>                                  | <b>107</b>              |
| <b>Services Group Total</b>                         | <b>796</b>        | <b>83</b>  | <b>63</b>                                  | <b>66</b>               |
| <b>Community Safety</b>                             | <b>42</b>         | <b>76</b>  | <b>90</b>                                  | <b>93</b>               |
| <b>Community Services Total</b>                     | <b>606</b>        | <b>80</b>  | <b>52</b>                                  | <b>56</b>               |
| Community Services                                  | 269               | 80   | 77   | 77                      |
| Community Services Hard Copy                        | 337               | N/A  | 32   | 39                      |
| <b>Highways &amp; Capital Projects Total</b>        | <b>189</b>        | <b>91</b>  | <b>79</b>                                  | <b>79</b>               |
| Highways & Capital Projects                         | 115               | 91   | 90   | 89                      |
| Highways & Capital Projects Hard Copy               | 74                | N/A  | 61   | 64                      |
| <b>Council Total</b>                                | <b>2177</b>       | <b>82</b>  | <b>78</b>                                  | <b>78</b>               |
| <b>Academy 10 Total</b>                             | <b>1766</b>       | <b>82</b>  | <b>88</b>                                  | <b>86</b>               |
| <b>Hard Copy Total</b>                              | <b>411</b>        | <b>N/A</b>   | <b>37</b>                                  | <b>43</b>               |