READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY DEPUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE

TO:	POLICY COMMITTEE		
DATE:	8 MARCH 2022		
TITLE:	INFORMATION MANAGEMENT STRATEGY		
LEAD COUNCILLOR:	CLLR RUTH McEWAN	**PORTFOLIO:**	CORPORATE AND CONSUMER SERVICES
SERVICE:		**WARDS:**	BOROUGHWIDE
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1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 This report presents the Council's Information Management Strategy and Action Plan to deliver better value from data and to ensure that the Council remains compliant with legal requirements for the processing of data.

Appendices:

Appendix 1   Information Management Strategy

Appendix 2   Information Management Strategy – Action Plan

2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

Policy Committee is asked:

2.1   To endorse the Information Management Strategy and Action Plan

2.2   To note that updates on the progress of the Action Plan will be presented to Audit and Governance Committee on a quarterly basis.

3. POLICY CONTEXT

3.1 The Council's new Corporate Plan has established three themes for the years 2022-2025. These themes are:

- Healthy Environment
- Thriving Communities
- Inclusive Economy

3.2 These themes are underpinned by "Our Foundations" explaining the ways we work at the Council:

- Customers first
- Digital transformation
- Building self-reliance

- Getting best value
- Collaborating with others

3.3   Full details of the Council's Corporate Plan and the projects which will deliver these priorities are published on the Council's website. These priorities and the Corporate Plan demonstrate how the Council meets its legal obligation to be efficient, effective and economical.

3.4   Data is playing an increasing role in designing, delivering and transforming public services to improve outcomes for customers and drive efficiencies within current financial constraints.

3.5   The Local Government Association describe the value of data to public services as facilitating:

- The design of services around user needs
- The engagement and empowerment of citizens to build their communities
- Efficiencies and public service transformation
- Economic and social growth
- Greater transparency and accountability

3.6   Effective information management is a key requirement for the Council which has duties to be both open and transparent whilst at the same time protecting the confidential information it holds about people and businesses. How it collects, uses, stores, shares and destroys personal data is governed by the Data Protection Act. The Council also must comply with the Freedom of Information Act, the Environmental Information Regulations and the Access to Information Act in relation to its records. Compliance is monitored by the Information Commissioner who has wide ranging powers including the ability to impose considerable financial penalties for breaches of the Data Protection Act.

4.   The Need for a Strategy

4.1   Information comes in many forms – policy documents, research papers, minutes, statistics, operational data, case files, personal data – and is held in a variety of printed and electronic formats. These are structured and unstructured Information Assets. Across the Council, this information and these assets are used to achieve our objectives – whether it be delivering services, formulating policy, managing projects or managing staff. Without an overarching Information Management Strategy these information systems are invariably separate, often not connected and possibly with duplications of data. They have evolved to respond to specific needs without being considered together as an asset.

4.2   In addition, many services are now delivered in partnership or are commissioned from third parties. This requires additional safeguards when managing our information: we need to ensure that information ownership is clear, the right people have appropriate access to the right information, and it is handled correctly throughout its lifecycle.

4.3   The Council is transforming the way we do business with our customers and increasing provision of digital services. The Connected Reading Digital Transformation Strategy was approved in July2021. It set out a vision, connected to the Council's strategic aims, to nurture:

Strong, connected relationships with residents, businesses and partners underpinning a healthy, thriving and inclusive borough.

4.4   That programme is a major enabler of the Customer Service Excellence Strategy, which was approved by Policy Committee in January 2020 and whose business case articulated

a strong dependency on technology and included a £2.5m capital budget for technology and business change.

4.5   The Council is increasingly becoming an organisation driven by data insights.   The proposed Information Management Strategy supports the Connected Reading Digital Transformation Strategy and the Customer Experience Strategy.

4.6   Evidence-based decision making requires good quality, relevant and timely information to support service delivery and the planning of future services. In our new more agile working environment staff need secure access to the information they need, at any time, from anywhere. To support more agile working, ensure compliance with our legal obligations and increase efficiency records must be regarded as corporate rather than personal assets. This requires a cultural shift away from information being held multiple times by numerous individuals in their personal drives and email stores, as well as paper filing systems. More and more we need to move towards consolidated records. The Smarter Working project has helped move this agenda forward through the implementation of Office 365 tools, including SharePoint which has become more widely used over the last two years as more staff worked from home during the pandemic. The next stage in this journey is the agreement and implementation of a SharePoint Strategy.

4.7   Additionally, there is now more external scrutiny of how councils manage their information, through enhanced data protection legislation, and a move towards greater openness and transparency around the information that we hold. To maximise the potential benefit from our information, we need to manage it effectively, re-use it where we can, share it appropriately and ensure that it is adequately protected. Past experience has shown us that this does not always happen –information that is not managed properly may be lost, shared with the wrong people or not found at all.

4.8   Poor data quality and failure to manage information appropriately can lead to:

* Poor value for money in terms of service delivery
* Additional costs of recreating or recovering lost information, and storing or digitising information we don't need
* Poor outcomes for customers, poor decision making, difficulty, delays or additional costs in providing on-going services
* Poor external inspection outcomes
* Loss of access to information (e.g. security incidents or systems unavailable) impacting residents rights and freedoms
* Penalties and fines

4.9   The Information Management Strategy attached at Appendix 1 sets out Reading Borough Council's approach to improving the way the Council creates, uses, manages, shares and protects information to achieve the Council's objectives and effective partnership working.

4.10   When information and data is well managed it brings a number of benefits to residents, staff and the Council:

Residents

* Your information is accurate, reliable and accessible
* Your transactions with the council and its partners will be processed promptly
* You will be confident that your information is protected and handled appropriately
* You will know what information we hold, how we use it and with whom it is shared
* Services are delivered more efficiently and cost effectively
* Decisions that affect you are more transparent
* You can participate more in decision making

- You can engage and collaborate with us in achieving our aims
- You can hold us to account

Staff

- You can find the information you need quickly and easily
- You know what your responsibilities are, what to keep and what to dispose of
- You can work more efficiently
- You can make the best use of resources, reusing information that you and colleagues create
- You can work more collaboratively, making best use of skills and knowledge
- You know what can be shared and with whom
- You know what information needs to be protected and what should be made available to the public
- You can provide assurance that risks are being managed and that you are complying with your responsibilities and legal requirements

The Council

- We can provide more effective services and help control costs
- We can be more transparent
- We can keep information protected and secure
- Our information risks and likelihood of associated fines are reduced
- Our customer experience is improved
- We build trust in the quality of our information both for staff and the public
- Our decisions and policies are better informed
- We can comply with legislation
- We can share our corporate memory with future generations
- We can meet expectations of how we will manage information
- Through the role of Information Asset Owners and Data Stewards, we are aware of our information holdings

5. IMPLEMENTATION

5.1 The Action Plan, attached at Appendix 2, is a working document; the implementation of which will be managed by the Information Governance Board. It is intended that regular progress reports on delivery of the Action Plan are provided to the Audit and Governance Committee on a quarterly basis. An annual report will be provided to Policy Committee on any changes required to the Strategy and progress against the action plan. Quarterly reports to Audit and Governance in the last year have tracked:

- Cyber Security and Data Protection Training Compliance
- Performance on Freedom of Information Requests
- Data Transparency compliance
- Progress on previous audit report findings

5.2 Some of the Action Plan measures have been suggested as the basis for reporting to Audit and Governance Committee. These are highlighted in the Action Plan appendix.

5.3 The initial focus of the Action Plan is geared towards good records management and compliance with legal requirements. Some aspects of the Action Plan will be dependent on identifying additional management resource to achieve their aims. With a small specialist Information Governance team created in Legal and Democratic Services, there is capacity to lead the Action Plan in conjunction with Services. The approach will be to engage with Information Asset Owners and Data Stewards to cascade the Policy and Action Plan requirements to all Services in the Council working through an Information Governance Champions Network (IGCN).

5.4   Once the initial structures of that Network are complete and some of the fundamental foundations in the Action Plan are assured, then work will begin on those other parts of the Action Plan awaiting resource.

6.   CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

6.1   The purpose of Information Management is cross-cutting and relevant to all Services of the Council and to all our public facing services which collect and retain data about the public. The role of Information Management contributes to the Corporate Priority foundation of "Getting best value".

7.   ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

7.1   The Council declared a Climate Emergency at its meeting on 26 February 2019 (Minute 48 refers).

7.2   There is nothing within this report which is of relevance for the Council's strategic priority of Climate Change.

8.   COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION

8.1   Section 138 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 places a duty on local authorities to involve local representatives when carrying out "any of its functions" by providing information, consulting or "involving in another way".

8.2   It is not anticipated that there will be public consultation on the Information Management Strategy or Action Plan. It is however now in the public domain at this Committee. Members will wish to receive regular updates, which will be made public through Audit and Governance Committee. This will ensure that progress in this field is visible to residents.

9.   EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

9.1   Under the Equality Act 2010, Section 149, a public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to:

- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act
- advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it
- foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it

9.2   An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) is not relevant to this report. All citizens have rights to information and there is no evidence that any section of the community is disadvantaged in accessing those rights under the current service provision. There is no reason to think that any section of society will be adversely affected by the roll-out of better Information Governance and an Information Management Strategy within the Council.

10.   LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1   There is a complex legal framework under which we must manage the information we are responsible for. This includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- General Data Protection Regulations 2016
- Data Protection Act 2018

- Digital Economy Act 2017
- Freedom of Information Act 2000
- Environmental Information Regulations 2005
- Re-use of Public Sector Information Regulations 2015
- Local Government Acts 1972, 1985, 1988 and 1992
- Public Records Acts 1958 and 1967
- Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2016
- Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988
- Copyright and Rights in Databases Regulations 1997
- Privacy and Electronic Communications Regulations 2003
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10.2   In addition, there are many information requirements specified in specific legislation governing the provision of services to children, adults, and other council services. Such regulatory requirements include, for instance, Caldicott principles, the Transparency Code of Practice and Code of Practice for Freedom of Information.

10.3   Effective governance, policies and practices are essential to minimising the risk of data protection breaches and to help ensure the appropriate handling of information requests. Failure to do so could result in regulatory action being taken against the Council.

11.   FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

11.1   There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

12.   BACKGROUND PAPERS

12.1   There are none