

Policy Committee

30 October 2023



Reading
Borough Council
Working better with you

Title	Digital & Customer Technology Delivery Update
Purpose of the report	To note the report for information
Report status	Public report
Report author	Martin Chalmers, Chief Digital and Information Officer
Lead Councillor	Cllr Liz Terry, Deputy Leader and Lead Councillor for Corporate Services and Resources
Corporate priority	Our Foundations
Recommendations	1. That Policy Committee notes the progress made to date on digital technology delivery.

1 Executive Summary

- 1.1 The *Connected Reading* Digital Transformation Strategy was approved in July 2021. A progress report on strategy implementation was provided in October 2022. That paper committed to the provision of a future progress update. This is that update.
- 1.2 The October 2022 paper also included a proposal, which was agreed, for the appointment of a Digital Transformation Partner. Following a framework mini-competition, PwC was selected as that partner, with the contract being signed in April 2023.
- 1.3 In parallel with the running of that procurement, the Council submitted a successful bid for digital transformation funding through the Future Councils Pilot competition run by DLUHC. A grant of £750k was received in March 2023.
- 1.4 Section 3 of this paper provides a update on each of the following workstreams, covering progress since October 2022 and next planned steps:
 - Case and Customer Management
 - Customer Journey Optimisation
 - Web Services Development
 - Digital Inclusion
 - Independent Living
 - Adult Social Care
 - Microsoft 365 Adoption and Exploitation.

2 Policy Context

- 2.1 The *Connected Reading* Digital Transformation Strategy set out a vision, connected to the Council's strategic aims, that **"Strong, connected relationships with residents, businesses and partners underpin a healthy, thriving and inclusive borough"**. Digital technologies also underpin the *Achieving Customer Service Excellence* Customer Experience Strategy, which was approved by the Policy Committee in January 2020.

- 2.2 The last progress report on strategy implementation was provided to Policy Committee in October 2022. That report provided updates on six workstreams and set out a proposal, which was agreed by Policy Committee, for the appointment of a Digital Transformation Delivery Partner on a framework contract basis.
- 2.3 Section 3 of this report describes, for each workstream, the progress made since the October 2022 report and the planned next steps. Section 4 describes the contributions that the work has made and will make to the delivery of the Council's strategic aims.

3 The Proposal

The proposal is that Policy Committee notes the progress and next steps set out below.

3.1 Procurement of Digital Transformation Delivery Partner

- 3.1.1 Following a framework mini-competition run via the Crown Commercial Services Management Consultancy Framework 3 contract, PwC was selected as the Digital Transformation Delivery Partner. The contract was signed in April 2023.
- 3.1.2 The contract is a framework agreement under which specific work packages are let, each being subject to appropriate business justification and approval. PwC's work with us is covered in the workstream updates below.

3.2 Case and Customer Management

- 3.2.1 As reported in October 2022, Arcus Global was selected through open competition as the supplier for this workstream, providing a solution based on the Salesforce Customer Relationship Management platform on to which Arcus Global has built "out of the box" forms and processes for a number of local government functions. The contract was signed in January 2023.
- 3.2.2 The project combines two requirements from the original digital transformation strategy. The first – **case management** - is to enable more efficient and effective delivery of around fifty functions in the fields of built environment, planning and regulatory services. This part of the project is at an advanced stage, with the system configuration stage nearing completion, preparations for data migration in train and the first user training due to launch in October. Go-live is planned for February 2024, in line with the approximate one-year duration noted in the October 2022 report.
- 3.2.3 Unlike the case management requirement, which is being met almost entirely through configuration of pre-existing Arcus Global product, the second requirement – **customer management** – requires a combination of existing product and the development of new forms and processes using Salesforce. Following completion of its design stage, the go-live date for this requirement has been planned for July 2024. This intentionally prudent timing reflects both the need to accommodate that development work and the need to avoid drawing the business into testing, training and deployment activity around the year-end and election periods.
- 3.2.4 The launch of the Case and Customer Management solution is being coordinated with:
- The introduction of **single sign-on** across web services so that customers need only one username and password to access all Council digital services
 - The provision of appropriate **mobile computing devices**, which will be selected in consultation with staff, so that field workers (eg in planning and regulatory roles) can use the Case and Customer Management System to enter information on site at the time of a visit, rather than needing to type the information into the system later in the office or at home.

3.3 Customer Journey Optimisation

- 3.3.1 In parallel with the Case and Customer Management project, PwC has undertaken a discovery exercise, identifying the potential for effectiveness and efficiency benefits to be gained by redesigning customer journeys end to end so that they work optimally for

customers and staff (both groups being involved in the design) and then implementing those designs. This will involve:

- Changes to business processes
- Revisions to the structure and content of the Council website, to make it easier to find and understand information, and carry out transactions
- Exploitation of the capabilities of the Case and Customer Management system currently under development
- The use of “chatbot” technology, to automate frequent, simple customer interactions via the website
- The use of voice automation, to allow such customer interactions to be delivered via voice, using conversational artificial intelligence, which can operate in multiple languages.

3.3.2 The next steps in this workstream are to confirm the first areas on which service redesign should be focused, and to select chatbot and voice automation technologies.

3.4 Web Services Development

3.4.1 The most significant single area of focus has been in the development of the **Housing Digital Presence**, a project that is being delivered by a multidisciplinary team drawn from Housing, the RBC web team and PwC. Since the start of this work in June 2023:

- Twenty web pages have been redesigned, in consultation with residents, of which ten have now gone live. The work has significantly improved the quality and accessibility of the content. Examples are the [Universal Credit](#) and [Paying your Rent](#) pages. The pages in development include a self-assessment form so that residents can better understand their eligibility and options in relation to council and affordable housing.
- Eight animated videos to assist residents through their housing application process have been developed and will shortly be launched.

3.4.2 In the next phase of this work, which was launched in September:

- Following the mapping of customer journeys for housing tenancy and housing repairs, twenty further web pages are being designed to enable greater self-service by residents. These include a new area covering the tenancy agreement.
- Four further videos, focused on homelessness and finding a home, will be developed.
- Design work relating to private renting and home improvement will be conducted.

3.4.3 Other significant web services delivery has included:

- **Delivery of an online version of the [Reading Transport Strategy 2040](#)**, presenting this important consultation, which is 180 pages in printable form, in a readily navigable and engaging form.
- **Development of a car park booking tool for the Civic Centre**, eliminating triple keying (user, customer fulfilment centre and security team) of car park booking requests and also acting as a pathfinder for the implementation of internal workflow using Microsoft automation products within our current suite, a significant tool for application rationalisation (our plan to reduce the large number of isolated small applications in use across the organisation by replacing them with the use of strategic platforms such as those provided by Microsoft and Salesforce).

3.4.4 Work currently in progress includes the **integration of the Love Clean Reading web application with the Whitespace system**, which is being extended to cover streetscene as well as waste. This will mean that reports by residents of litter, graffiti, etc will be automatically transferred into the Whitespace application for action by streetscene teams. (Currently, such reports generate emails which have to be manually transcribed into the application.)

3.5 Digital Inclusion

3.5.1 The following progress has been made on the areas for action identified in the October 2022 update:

- A proof-of-concept **public WiFi solution** was successfully completed at the Pinecroft children's residential unit and the Cressingham children's short-break service. In order to ensure best value, an additional proof of concept from another supplier was commissioned at Sun Street, Hexham Road Community Centre, Coley Community Centre, and the Ground floor of the Civic Centre in reception and the surrounding areas. The conclusions of this latter work will be available in the very near future, which will enable a decision to be taken on procurement and rollout to other Council buildings.
- A contract has been placed with a provider which can **sanitise and refurbish old Council laptops for donation**. So far in the last 18 months we have had 21 cleansed and refurbished laptops available to donate to the community. The small numbers reflect the fact that most equipment released to that provider has not been reusable. This reflects both the need to retain equipment for spares and the fact that the Council has been operating laptops significantly beyond their normal lifetime. With the move to a shorter technology refresh cycle (this year, all laptops over seven years old are being replaced), the numbers of released, fully depreciated but reusable laptops are likely to increase in the future. Recipients of refurbished laptops so far have been Whitley Wood Community Centre and Cedar Court sheltered accommodation.
- **Broadband connectivity is now to be provided to all community centres** owned and managed by the Council at no charge by Virgin Media as part of their social value commitments. (This is wider provision than originally planned.) The first stages of site design and deployment work by Virgin Media and their third parties, are now in progress. We are also planning the use of volunteer effort from suppliers to help with community awareness and skills around the launch of these connections in early 2024.

3.6 Independent Living

3.6.1 This workstream is piloting the use of digital in its broadest sense to enable vulnerable and elderly people to live as independently as is right for them for as long as possible, building on successes already achieved through the implementation of "first generation" technology-enabled care such as fall detectors. Its primary focus is on intelligent pattern-of-life analysis via in-home sensors that enables a shift to proactive care, eg detecting patterns of behaviour that indicate a fall is more likely, rather than simply detecting that a fall has occurred.

3.6.2 In October 2022, we reported that Howz and Intelligent Lilli had each been selected as pilot providers. In an ongoing pilot, solutions have been trialled with over thirty service users. The results have confirmed the hypothesis that such technology can indeed enable prolonged independence, improving the quality of life of service users and avoiding unnecessary cost. Pilot cases have included:

- a number of cases where service users' families, who had been concerned that additional care might be required, have been reassured by the data that this is not necessary, both reducing their stress and supporting decisions not to increase care, with associated cost
- a case where data collected led to the proactive identification of medical issues leading to changes in treatment which in turn have reduced the risk of a fall
- a case where data enabled a provider to respond to an issue by re-timetabling the delivery of its existing care better to meet the needs of the service users, rather than increase the amount and cost of care.

3.6.3 In October 2023, the Council was awarded a £1.08m (over 2 years) grant from NHS England for continuation of the project Mobilisation of the next stage of the project enabled by that funding, is in progress.

3.7 Adult Social Care

3.7.1 Work has been carried out on two projects relating to Adult Social Care. The first, **Adult Social Care Digital Front Door**, was a requirement identified in the *Connected Reading* strategy. Its purpose is to offer a digital entry point to residents and health professionals for information, advice and guidance, online needs assessment and online referral.

3.7.2 PwC has conducted options assessment and business case development for the project and the Mosaic Portal, which is a key component of the approach, has been recently procured. Delivery plans are currently being developed in tandem with the planning around the related Voluntary and Community Sector Front Door initiative.

3.7.3 The second project has been **Adult Social Care System and Process Improvement**, a study for which was commissioned from PwC and has been recently completed. This work leads on from the work on Mosaic Data, reported on in October 2022, which identified the need for work on the way in which Mosaic is configured and used. Following review of the study report, which identified clear areas in which processes could be simplified to improve staff efficiency and effectiveness, PwC has been asked to plan in detail a first increment of improvement work. The report has also identified the potential for significant improvements to the financial element of Mosaic. A capital bid for work in that area is being considered for potential inclusion in the Medium Term Financial Strategy.

3.8 Microsoft 365 Adoption and Exploitation

3.8.1 Having made a significant commitment to Microsoft 365, which includes the Office suite and such collaboration tools as Sharepoint, it is important that we maximise value for money by exploiting its capabilities. The first step in this process – the migration of shared files to SharePoint, which was described in the October 2022 report – was completed in early 2023.

3.8.2 Informed by that project, which included a significant training element incorporating both online and face-to-face training, we are now focusing even further on staff digital skills training. We have conducted a staff skills survey which found that, while user confidence in using standard applications such as Word and Outlook was high, confidence for Teams, SharePoint and Excel was low.

3.8.3 Alongside continued work to develop the ICT training offer, and to engage senior leaders both to understand teams' training needs and to promote the support available, we are planning to initiate a project to build and equip a network of internal digital champions. This is in line with good practice successfully adopted in other authorities with whom we have engaged as part of our participation in the DLUCH Future Councils programme.

4 Contribution to Strategic Aims

4.1 The *Connected Reading* Digital Strategy was expressly designed to support all three themes of the Corporate Plan. This is reflected by the fact that Digital Transformation is itself identified explicitly as one of "Our Foundations".

4.2 A benefit common to many of the workstreams described above, notably the Case and Customer Management stream, is that they **eliminate the double-keying of information between systems**. For example, the implementation of the Adult Social Care Digital Front Door will eliminate the need for adult social care referrals to be manually transcribed from the current Granicus electronic forms system to the Mosaic social care system, a process that can take up to half an hour.

- 4.3 While the Case and Customer Management and Adult Social Care system and Process improvement workstreams deliver efficiency savings for structured processes, the Microsoft 365 Adoption and Exploitation workstream is focused on **enabling efficient collaboration**. For example, it has been used to streamline the production of committee papers such as this one by allowing multiple authors and reviewers to collaborate by working together on a single copy of a document, rather than exchanging multiple versions of documents and comments via email.
- 4.4 The workstreams also enable customers readily to engage with the Council via digital channels. In line with the **customers first** aspect of Our Foundations, facilitating access to such channels, particularly for routine transactions for the many for whom digital is now the norm both improves service to those customers and frees staff time to deal with complex cases and those for whom digital access is not appropriate. The potential introduction of voice automation as part of the Customer Journey Optimisation workstream offers the prospect of extending automated access for routine transactions to those who are not digital users.
- 4.5 Giving readily accessible information to residents – as, for example, we are doing through the videos developed for Housing Digital Presence and content produced under Web Services Development – **builds self-reliance** and engagement with residents. Through our work on Digital Inclusion, we are extending the reach of that benefit.
- 4.6 The building of self-reliance is also a key outcome of the Independent Living project, where the trial has confirmed the potential for technology to enable people to live more independently, with both quality-of-life benefits for the residents and financial savings.

5 Environmental and Climate Implications

- 5.1 There are no direct environmental or climate implications from the workstreams described in this paper. However, it should be noted that the work is an enabler of the delivery of climate-related benefits by the wider Council, the engaging digital presentation of the Local Transport Plan being one example.

6 Community Engagement

- 6.1 In line with industry best practice for user-centred design, the community is being engaged in testing the design of customer-facing digital services and content. For example, content developed in the Housing Digital Presence workstream has been tested with tenants through Tenant Panel sessions.

7 Equality Implications

- 7.1 There are no specific equality impacts arising from this decision. However, accessibility continues to be a design criterion for any digital services (eg compliance with the internationally accepted Web Content Accessibility Guidelines).

8 Other Relevant Considerations

- 8.1 None.

9 Legal Implications

- 9.1 None.

10 Financial Implications

- 10.1 There are no specific financial implications arising from this paper as it is a progress report.
- 10.2 The work described above is being funded from a combination of:
- a grant of £750k which was secured in March 2023 through a successful competitive bid to the DLUHC Future Councils Programme
 - existing capital budgets

- Delivery Fund allocations

10.3 Digital transformation contributes to business efficiency through, in particular:

- **Reductions in demand**, eg:
 - The tenant-focused content being developed by Housing Digital Presence is designed to reduce not only questions from tenants but also the occurrence of incidents that might necessitate repairs or other action.
 - The Independent Living pilot has proved by example that it can enable unnecessary increases to care packages.
- **“Shift left”** of demand from human to digital channels by providing online content and processes that are engaging and easy to use, so that users will turn to digital channels before telephoning the Council. This is a focus of the Case and Customer Management, Web Services Development and Customer Journey Optimisation workstreams, including the latter’s exploration of voice automation that turns the telephone itself into a digital channel. The work on Digital Inclusion is intended to reduce barriers to those who would wish to use digital channels but are at present excluded from doing so.
- **Increased process efficiency**, for example the elimination of double-keying as set out at 4.2 above. Improved processes also reduce failure demand.

10.4 The impact of such benefits is being factored into the forthcoming Medium Term Financial Strategy for review as part of the forthcoming budget process.

11 Timetable for Implementation

11.1 Implementation details are covered at section 3 above.

12 Background Papers

12.1 None