

STRATEGY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

8 OCTOBER 2020

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Report Title	IT STRATEGY AND INVESTMENT PROGRESS			
Purpose of Report	To update the Committee on progress made on the ICT Infrastructure Upgrade Project and note that the residual budget from the project will transfer to the Technology and Digital Workstream of the Modernisation Programme to invest in digital products that deliver the objectives of the programme.			
Decision(s)	The Committee RESOLVES to note the report			
Consultation and Feedback	The Infrastructure Upgrade Project has been developed and delivered in partnership with external consultants Foresight Consulting.			
Report Author	Caron Starkey, Strategic Director of Transformation and Change Email: caron.starkey@stroud.gov.uk			
Options	None			
Background Papers	None			
Appendices	None			
Implications (further details at the end of the report)	Financial	Legal	Equality	Environmental
	Yes	No	No	No

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1** The council allocated a significant capital budget of £1.8m to upgrade the organisation's ICT in 2018 following the engagement of SOCITM to identify the technology and digital requirements appropriate for a modern technology environment which would deliver modern citizen service access and delivery expectations and organisational efficiencies.
- 1.2** The Peer Challenge undertaken at the Council in March 2019 identified areas for improvement and highlighted the pressing need to upgrade the ICT infrastructure. The relevant Action Plan item is as follows:
- REC 3 (CRD3) Ensure the integrity of the current ICT system. Review the progress and suitability of current plans, capability and capacity in respect of this, and beyond that to confirm the emerging plans in respect of ICT development and digital delivery fit with longer term transformational plans.
- 1.3** The Corporate Delivery Plan also contains the action:
- CDP5.22 Adopt a clear vision and digital strategy which is fit for purpose to deliver good quality, convenient and efficient services for staff, residents and businesses.

- 1.4** In exploring options to move forward the recommendations from SOCITM it became apparent the existing ICT Infrastructure was ageing, some elements beyond or nearing end of life and it was not sufficiently resilient to support new technologies and the digital ambitions. Foresight Consulting were engaged to provide a high level of technical expertise and capacity to deliver. They undertook a review of the technical environment and identified solutions that could be delivered at pace to protect and enhance the technical operating environment on which the organisation relies for the delivery of critical services to communities.
- 1.5** A costed, within budget, Infrastructure Upgrade Project was instigated and commenced in October 2019. This foundation project to provide a modern technical operating environment has been the focus of the ICT Team for the last year, interrupted momentarily in March/April 2020 when some resources were diverted to support Covid-19 Response activity and enabling the workforce to work from home effectively. There was also a delay of approximately three months of the delivery of some key equipment from manufacturers during the peak of international Covid-19 impact.

2. Infrastructure Upgrade Project - identified requirements

2.1 Foresight Consulting reviewed the technology estate and identified the following:

- The Storage/Compute was end of life, lacked capacity and was beginning to fail and causing outages. It was unable to meet the operating demands of the organisation.
- The analogue telephony provision with its fixed desktop handsets provided minimal integration opportunities and made recovery scenarios difficult following system interruptions.
- Disaster Recovery provision was high risk
- The Network was poor offering little resilience with failing network switches and low capacity WAN links. Regular outages and performance problems were impacting on productivity.
- Fixed desktop devices serviced through a thin client solution which was about to expire. A quick decision was required on whether to continue with thin client or move to a more flexible solution provided by laptop devices offering flexible working.
- Members ICT provision was limited, again based on thin client connectivity, non-standard devices and slow to access for users.
- Compatibility issues between applications, old data bases and servers, not least with the existence of end of life software such as Office 2007.
- The website was hosted on premise limiting options, resilience and integrations for development.

Taken in the round there were too many end to end issues to provide a resilient and reliable environment for the organisation. Alongside the urgent decision on desktop devices there was an immediate need to update the on-premise infrastructure to provide a safe ICT infrastructure for the next five years and enable time to develop a full ICT Strategy to include the transition of the systems and applications to a cloud-based model aligned to contract timings and supplier development plans.

2.2 The already allocated capital budget was available to draw down immediately and project plans were put in place quickly for work to commence in November 2019. The project prioritised the immediate risks to data, security and customer access.

3. Infrastructure Upgrade Project - progress to date

3.1 Work has continued at pace with the support of Foresight overseeing the project and managing the risks. The IT Team has worked together well and delivered the project objectives despite the additional significant pressures of supporting the organisation in its Covid-19 Response and facilitating the swift deployment of all laptop devices to enable almost all the workforce to work from home during the lockdown period. The project has delivered the following:

- The network is now secure with significantly improved performance
- Storage and servers have been replaced and now offer secure platform for future applications and data storage.
- The desktop has been updated with staff receiving modern laptop devices, always-on remote access, hot desk capability at the office and a modern suite of software programs.
- The new Littlecombe site has been designated as the Disaster Recovery location for ICT services and new infrastructure installed on site. A copy of all data and servers is stored there offering a rapid recovery should the main provision at Ebley Mill fail.
- Out of support applications have mainly been updated to current releases i.e Office 2007, Server 2008 and SQL 2005 were all in wide use a year ago which presented a very high risk. Now only a few 2008 servers remain on the network and have a plan for update.

3.2 It cannot be overstated how much the team has managed to deliver in extraordinary circumstances with the assistance from Foresight Consulting. Stroud District Council now has a secure and resilient technology environment and a sound platform on which to build an ambitious digital community offering across all services.

4. Risk and Issue Mitigation

4.1 The old technology created significant risks to the operation of the organisation, as reflected in the corporate risk register. The project was focussed on mitigating those risks. The project elements were assessed to profile the transition to acceptable risk levels. The risk profiles for each element of the technology estate were mapped on a timeline to show the progressive improvement from high risk, improving through to medium risk and fully mitigated to low risk/safe.

4.2 All elements excepting Telephony have now moved from high risk. All elements will be fully mitigated and be low risk/safe by February 2020. The Corporate Risk Register will be updated to reflect the new safe and secure ICT infrastructure estate.

5. Infrastructure Upgrade Project – still to complete

5.1 The elements of the project still to complete are:

- Telephony – migration to digital from analogue network. This will enable full integration to allow calls to be handled through staff laptops and a smart phone app. This will significantly enhance home working and contact centre arrangements.
- Members ICT – a new solution for improved access to systems. Options for devices tailored to preferred ways of working. Rolling out new software solutions such as Modern.gov for democratic functions, Office 365 (direct cloud access) including Teams and exploring the functionality and content of a Member’s Portal.
- Website – project to be scoped to migrate to cloud hosting. Integration with Contact Centre provision including Customer Relationship Management software
- Greater adoption and roll out of further functionality of Office 365 including Teams, SharePoint and a cloud email platform.
- Comprehensive ICT Strategy for 2021-2026 to be developed by new Head of Technology post.

5.2 As the Infrastructure Upgrade and the oversight from Foresight Consulting comes to a close the remaining elements and the emerging digital plans of the Modernisation Programme will transfer to the Technology and Digital Workstream within the Modernisation Programme. This workstream will be led by the new Head of Technology post which is about to go out for recruitment. This new role is a significant strategic position within the organisation and will provide the expertise and capacity to deliver on the digital ambitions of the modernisation of council operations.

5.3 The residual budget of the Infrastructure Upgrade Project will transfer to the Technology and Digital Workstream to complete the outstanding elements and create the digital design and delivery. The key component of the digital modernisation of the organisation is a Digital Platform Product that will provide the digital backbone of the organisation enabling people, systems and processes to connect and deliver.

6. Infrastructure Upgrade Project – Summary costs as at 31.08.20

Element	Capital cost £	Annual Revenue cost £
Connectivity	301,000	43,000
Storage Area Network	367,000	
Telephony	51,000	10,000
Desktop	357,000	
Infrastructure Software	16,000	71,000
Data Security	10,000	
Spend prior to project	200,000	
Total	1,302,000	124,000

The project has also delivered £199,000 of annual revenue savings as the technology estate has moved over to new solutions and contracts.

7. Next steps – Delivering Digital through a Digital Platform

7.1 Stroud District Council is seeking to create significant improvements in its offer to service users and businesses by implementing a digital platform for online services in order to drive transformational change within the Council and improve efficiencies in service delivery to internal and external stakeholders.

7.2 As the infrastructure is now upgraded and stable we are in a position to procure and implement a digital platform to meet key strategic outcomes and enable future services to be offered online. This will enable web based service transactions that interact with the Council's back office systems to be self-serve and automated. In this way the Council can make services available at any time, raise customer satisfaction with transactions being completed as a single process and provide customers with regular updates to their requests through automated notifications. The main aims of for the deployment of a digital platform are:

- Improving customer access to services
- Improving customer satisfaction with services
- Reducing costs of service delivery

7.3 The Council's objectives for a digital platform are:

- **Infrastructure.** Modernising the Council IT infrastructure by improving systems integration and rationalising the applications portfolio.
- **Web Forms.** Improving the web forms capabilities by analysing and improving the current online processes as well as introducing new ones.
- **Web Site.** Ensuring effective interoperability between the services hosted on the digital platform and the information/advice services available through the Council's web site.
- **On line account access.** Allowing service users to view accounts held with the Council via their portal account (for example; council tax, housing rent etc.)
- **Single sign on.** Providing service users with seamless access to any on line accounts and services that they receive from the council.
- **Status Tracking.** Enabling service users to view status of enquiries/requests logged through the platform at any time and keeping service users automatically updated about changes to status.
- **Customer Relationship Management.** Providing Council employees (Contact Centre) with a customer management system to record and track transactions with customers.
- **Mobile Working.** Enhancing the service offering through better use of technology through mobile working and mobile applications.
- **Reporting.** Enabling different levels of reporting access to different service users depending upon their needs and responsibilities. Whilst the majority of service users will only need to report the status of requests relating to themselves, others with wider community leadership responsibilities have more sophisticated reporting needs.

7.4 The cost of the digital platform product can be funded through the residual Infrastructure Upgrade Project budget. The council has also previously set aside a transformation fund which will fund essential and dependent modernisation activity in the other modernisation programme workstreams which will drive the cultural, procedural and organisational

changes which ensure the adoption and embedding of digital provisions and new ways of working.

8. IMPLICATIONS

8.1 Financial Implications

The capital costs of the infrastructure Refresh Programme are included within the existing capital programme as set out in the report. Revenue costs have been funded from savings generated by replacement of infrastructure or services.

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8.2 Legal Implications

There are no legal implications arising from the recommendations in this report, however a further report will be necessary to authorise the procurement of a digital platform and to arrange for suitable delegations to carry out the procurement and conclude any consequential documentation.

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8.3 Equality Implications

There are no equality implications arising from the recommendations made in this report.

8.4 Environmental Implications

There are no environmental implications arising from the recommendations made in this report.