

ORGANISATION AND COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY PANEL	DATE 13 March 2025	ITEM NO 6
SUBJECT Digital Strategy	WARD (S) All	
CHIEF OFFICER Director of Resources	CABINET MEMBER Finance, Resources & Social Value	
DECISION CLASSIFICATION Scrutiny Report		

SECTION I

1. Recommendations to decision maker:

- 1.1 To consider the Digital Strategy Report and make recommendations to the Executive, if necessary.
- 1.2 To agree that where appropriate, the report and any recommendations be submitted to the Chief Executive.
- 1.3 To note that where possible, the report and responses to the recommendations be presented at the next meeting of the Panel.

2. Links to Our Greenwich Missions

- 2.1 This report relates to the Council's agreed missions as follows:
 - We design our services around the needs of our residents – reference to development of new digital products
 - Our Council is an adaptive organisation, enabling it to navigate the increasing number of challenges it faces while remaining financially sustainable – reference to service design and digital savings

- Our Council works in the most efficient and effective ways possible – reference to internal digital products such as the new intranet
- Our Council is a great place to work, with a diverse workforce who have the right skills and are motivated and empowered to deliver – reference to digital restructure.

3. Purpose of Report and Executive Summary

3.1 This report was commissioned as part of the Organisation and Communities Scrutiny Panel's 2024-2025 work programme. The report seeks to provide updates on the Council's Digital Strategy.

3.2 The commissioned brief for the report was as follows:

- An update on ICT and progress of the Digital Improvement Programme

SECTION 2

4. The Report

Overview

4.1 The council's digital strategy was published in November 2020, with funding approved at the end of February 2021 and a restructure approved in March 2021 to allow growth and significant development from a traditional technology support team to a full in-house digital team. The digital strategy outlined 6 workstreams:

- New online services for residents, with support for those who can't get online
- Better tools for staff
- Get better with data
- Modernise our infrastructure
- Build digital capability
- Support innovation across the borough

4.2 As the sixth workstream is largely led by Digital Greenwich, this report focuses on the first 5 workstreams.

- 4.3 This is the last year of the lifecycle of the strategy, which runs until April. We are writing a new strategy which will be published in spring; we outline some of the major themes to be included in the strategy at the end of this report.
- 4.4 The actions outlined in the digital strategy have largely been realised; a line-by-line review of delivery will be published as part of the next strategy. We are proud of everything that has been achieved since the strategy was written; this report focuses on the most recent year of work.
- 4.5 The work of the digital team has far outstripped what was envisaged in the strategy. Since 2021 the team has built partnerships across the organisation and borough to not only meet the aims of the digital strategy, but also to build large-scale change programmes which enable holistic change in a number of our critical service areas. We have undertaken activities relating to each of the 5 major workstreams of the digital strategy, and have begun several others. In addition, with the digital team now being over 3 years old, we are now in a position where we run considerable BAU services. We have mentioned some of these in the update below.
- 4.6 The core digital team is around 100, with additional teams in housing and IT and financial system support. This makes the total headcount of the digital team 140-150.

Delivery this year

- 4.7 The main 2024/25 deliverables so far are broken down here by workstream.

Workstream 1: new services for residents

4.8 Council Tax online: Our online council tax service, launched in 2021, allows residents to create an online council tax account linked to their property. From this account, residents can set up and amend direct debits, check their balance, make payments, view and download their bills. Around 48,000 properties now have an online account registered. In early February we launched paperless billing, which saves nearly £1 per paper bill avoided. Around

1000 residents have already chosen paperless billing, with major promotional work still to come.

4.9 New website: In 2024, we relaunched the council's website to make it more usable, more accessible and easier to navigate. The new site is organised around resident-facing services, which paves the way for us to make more services available to residents online and improve the quality of those that already exist.

4.10 The redesigned site has been optimised for use on mobile devices, and tested with residents who have disabilities to improve the accessibility of information and services to the public. In parallel, we have transformed the content to make it easier to find and understand. We have reduced the average reading age from age 13 to age 9, rewritten content to meet user needs, and removed 37% of the total content where information was outdated or superfluous.

4.11 The new website uses an open-source content management system, LocalGovDrupal, which is designed specifically to build and run local council websites. This will reduce running costs by enabling us to exit contracts for the old content management system, and has made it quicker and easier for staff to keep information up to date for residents.

4.12 GCD: Last summer we launched a new version of the Greenwich Community Directory (greenwichcommunitydirectory.org.uk), which helps residents access community support services and advice content, for adults, children and families, and children and young people with SEND. The site was redesigned with residents, to reflect the services and content residents are seeking. We've made it easier to find relevant services and crucially, keep service listings up-to-date for residents. The new design is also more accessible to residents with disabilities, with a reduced average reading age across the site from 15 to 12 years. As a result, residents' use of the directory has steadily increased, with service listing views nearly doubling in Q3 compared to Q1. Provider engagement has also grown, with more service providers creating accounts. The new Greenwich Community Directory uses open-source software (Outpost and LocalGovDrupal), which enables us to deliver better quality products for residents at lower cost, saving approximately £38k in annual costs.

4.13 Street Services: In the last few months we've developed 2 new transactions for the Street Services team. These enable businesses to get an instant online quote for commercial waste collections and take the first step in signing up to the service (<https://www.royalgreenwich.gov.uk/forms/request-call-back-for-business-waste-collections#no-back>). Business waste collections currently generate ~£1.2m a year. These new transactional services will help us to retain our existing customers and attract new customers as new legislation comes in in April requiring businesses to have separate food waste collections. Next, we'll be continuing to work with the Street Services team on a new resident-facing online service: sign up for garden waste collections.

4.14 Housing Support Finder: We launched a new tool in August 2024 (<https://www.royalgreenwich.gov.uk/housing-support-finder>) to increase visibility of social housing availability and help residents understand the quickest route to a settled home for their situation.

Most residents who approach the council for support with homelessness expect to obtain a social housing tenancy. However, demand vastly outstrips supply, with more than 27,000 households on our housing register, but only around 1,000 homes available each year. Residents can now access an estimated social housing waiting time online, and see alternative options at a glance.

More than 7,500 people have used the service since launch. Research with residents has shown that households appreciate the increased visibility, enabling their housing needs to be met more quickly. It has also freed up time for housing staff, enabling them to focus on supporting residents rather than discussing waiting times.

4.15 Repairs programme: The Repairs Transformation Programme is over two years through its four-year lifespan. Since its inception the programme has delivered on a series of technology, data, people, processes and organisational change. Highlights include improvements to residents' experience, such as:

- Launched two new, user-friendly webforms to report a new repair or request an update, which capture better information for us and enable residents to upload a photo of their repair.

- Launched 36 pages of new and improved web content to set clearer expectations about what we can and can't repair, including new guidance and information about damp and mould.
- A new diagnosis and triage process for cases of damp, mould and condensation so residents get a faster, targeted triage that meets their needs. Since its launch over 700 cases have been raised using new our new guidance and call scripts and over 220 high priority cases have been sent directly to the DMC specialist team via our new webform pathway and over 300 urgent jobs have been flagged or raised using new codes.
- A series of pilots to reduce communication gaps with residents, including setting up a dedicated follow on line for staff in Plumbing, Carpentry and Plaster (over 50% of all repairs jobs). Staff do not leave the resident's home until a mutually convenient follow on appointment is made, so far resulting in ~5,000 residents now knowing what is happening next with their repair that didn't otherwise.
- Merging the housing repairs contact centre into the corporate contact centre, leading to improved, easier to use services for residents with new operational escalation processes to ensure residents get a timely response, financial savings of 60k and increased satisfaction of staff through new cross skilling and training opportunities.
- Improvements to data and performance management, including: a new data tool to help managers and leaders make informed decisions, in real time, and manage performance effectively.
- Re-designing, restructuring and mobilising teams to improve productivity, efficiency and ensure we are responding to increased pressures, including:
 - A new specialist damp, mould and condensation team made up of 7 staff guided by an ambitious new damp, mould and condensation service offer which was co-designed with staff and residents.
 - Multiple restructures and team changes. All job descriptions and specifications have been refreshed including Greenwich Council values and a resident focus, with expectations and responsibilities outlined clearly.
- Closing costly ineffective areas with savings of £368,000 to the HRA

4.16 Assistive technology-enabled care: We are preparing to launch a groundbreaking integrated new digital and health and care service. From April 2025, residents in Greenwich will be able to access digital health and care technology solutions, to support them to live more independent, safer and empowered lives. This service has been coproduced with residents over 2 years, and is delivering in an integrated way across RBG HAS, Oxleas and SEL ICS. The service will provide more choice for people in how they achieve their best outcomes and goals, support digital inclusion and connectivity, and be the platform for an aspirational offer that supports both people and the Greenwich health and care system. We will use data to help people upstream where we can, to improve individual lives and population health.

4.17 Greenwich Supports Strategy (formerly known as anti-poverty strategy) This year we have worked with front-line staff, community leads and residents to inform how we can best prevent residents from falling, or falling more deeply, into poverty. This strategic work has led to a forthcoming pilot where a multi-disciplinary team made up of officers from across the council will focus on a group of residents to work with, to try to make positive impacts through offering holistic support.

Workstream 2: better tools for staff

4.18 Street Services: We co-designed and built a rostering product to improve efficiency in the council's streets and waste service, which launched in March 2024. The app brings together real-time information about staff availability. By making the shift from paper-based staff allocation to digital shift management, it has become quicker and less-error prone to manage daily staffing for waste collection and street cleansing rounds across the borough. These changes freed up an average of 82 minutes of time per shift for each supervisor in the service, enabling staff to focus on the quality of the service we deliver, instead of collating information about staff availability.

4.19 Temporary Accommodation Cost Reduction programme: In September 2023, Royal Borough of Greenwich, along with councils across London and the country, was facing a homelessness and Temporary Accommodation (TA) crisis. There was an unprecedented number of households in TA, a worrying increase in the use of hotels as temporary

accommodation (from 5 hotel rooms per night in September 2022, to 269 a year later), and a forecast overspend of ~£14 million.

The Temporary Accommodation Cost Reduction Programme brought together more than 50 staff from a dozen teams to take a hypothesis-led response to the crisis. Since September 2023, 31 hypotheses have been tested, many of which have been scaled up and successfully implemented. We led on the implementation of:

- A data tool that made hotel pricing data available to housing staff, so they could book the most cost-effective rooms for residents who required temporary accommodation. In the 15 months since the tool has been used, it has led to a ~20% reduction in hotel net cost compared to the same period last year. This equates to a cost avoidance of ~£1.3 million in that time
- An improved new-build mobilisation process, which allowed the 133 new units across Sandy Hill Road and Greenwich Millenium Village to be let twice as quickly as would previously have been possible. Mobilising the units twice as quickly allowed 116 families and 17 single people to begin their new lives in high quality, settled accommodation as quickly and smoothly as possible
- A discovery into TA prevention and move-on best practice which has generated a number of insights that will inform future service design

In spite of a continuous increase in the number of homeless approaches we receive, the combined impact of all interventions implemented by the programme so far has:

- Led to a positive impact on the council's financial position
- Supported hundreds of families and dozens of single households into better quality social and or temporary accommodation. Including reducing the number of households in unsuitable hotel accommodation from a peak of 289 down to under 100.

4.20 Intranet: From April to October 2024, we worked closely with HR Policy team to update guidance and processes following legislation to Flexible Working and are continuing to support the team with further legislation updates into 2025. We have collaborated with Procurement to implement improved guidance and new processes in anticipation of the Procurement Act. This enables staff to initially self-serve their procurement requests and improve

the information collected for the procurement team that support throughout the process. Throughout 2024, we helped staff find information through search using promoted search results, increasing the use of meta data to make content easier to find, which has reduced abandoned searches from 60% down to 48%.

4.21 Rethinking Recruitment: In 2024 we went out to tender for a new applicant tracking system. From reviewing bids, we selected Tribepad to replace Giant, initiating our implementation from mid-February 2025 with a target launch date of 27 May 2025.

We streamlined the recruitment form, splitting it between agency and direct recruitment, removed finance comments and delegated approvals to AD. This has saved up to 28% of Finance officer's time each week and speeding up completion time for a recruitment form from an average of 2 weeks down to 1 week or less, with 64% of recruiting managers saying that it takes less time to fill out the new form.

4.22 Adult social care transformation: We continue to partner in depth with HAS colleagues to bring about wholesale change to ways of working. This year we undertook operational trials to test and learn new ways of working to address operational challenges including long resident waiting time for review and inefficiency of hand-overs and resident information gathering.

We also partnered with the reablement team to expand service capacity and achieve cost savings by supporting more residents to regain independence after illness or hospital stays. Recent improvements, including better NHS system access, staff rotation redesign, and a new online referral process, have already led to higher number of accepted referrals, with ongoing impact assessments underway.

We are currently in the process of co-designing a new Adult Social care operating model and reorganisation with the aim to bring strength-based practice to life, enable important cultural and ways of working change, and make the service more resilient to future demand and rising complexity.

Workstream 3: get better with data

4.23 Data Analytics in Temporary Accommodation: Fragmented data across multiple systems made it difficult to track family numbers and overall costs. To address this, our data team extracted, amalgamated and cleansed the data, built a dashboard to highlight key trends, costs, and locations for TA. Information provided by this work helped inform transformation work that has reduced the cost of hotel nightly costs (see above).

4.24 Corporate Dashboard: To track and communicate progress against our 'Our Greenwich' corporate plan effectively, the data team has developed an externally accessible, user-friendly corporate dashboard. This dashboard allows users to drill down and highlight key milestones across all of our missions. It enables both residents and elected members to explore progress in detail, ensuring transparency and accountability.

4.25 HR Process Automation: We have developed a streamlined system for tracking new starter appointments, monitoring pre-employment checks, and managing the recruitment team's workload using a SharePoint List for logging new starters, and Power Automate for creating automations. This system acts as an end-to-end tracker for the onboarding process, automates communication with hiring managers and applicants, and ensure timely processing through alerts. It also reduces the manual workload, provides consistent workflows for recruitment officers and allow for easy management reporting of KPIs, improving overall efficiency and service delivery.

This provides a centralised system to manage and monitor the new starter process, reducing manual tasks and improving consistency across the recruitment team.

4.26 Financial System Assessment & Procurement: An assessment of our current financial system was conducted in June 2024 as part of the Rethinking Finance programme. It was deemed that the system was not suitable for future advancements in our financial processes and performance monitoring. We have undertaken a procurement exercise to find an alternative provider with the migration project beginning in April 2025.

4.27 Parking Dashboards: In October 2023 we integrated our systems to be able to extract data from our parking system. Over the last year we have been working to provide analytics information on parking to the service to

improve parking performance. Following improvements to the service we have also provided tools to monitor performance.

Workstream 4: modernise our infrastructure

4.28 Hosting: We have continued to shrink our on-premise hosting. The reduction in servers and the introduction of newer technologies has reduced the space from 5 cabinets to one, which in turn has reduced the carbon footprint of RBG's servers and computing.

Network improvements this year have delivered faster internet connections to RBG locations, at a reduced cost. This was delivered using DG Connect services; a joint venture between the DG Cities (a council-owned company) and ITS, who are installing services across the council area. 20+ sites are being migrated.

4.29 Review of staff devices. Our remote working portfolio is complete with the 'deskphone' now being on staff laptops, and physical handsets removed. Many staff no longer need a corporate smartphone, and devices that are no longer essential have been reclaimed and redeployed (often to replace out of support equipment) with a cost avoidance saving of over £250,000 across the organisation. Where staff still want the convenience offered by a smart phone, they are able to use their personal smartphone if it meets the necessary standards. This is known as BYOD - Bring Your Own Device, and is being actively promoted.

4.30 PSTN Switch Off – the analogue telephone network will end by next year. We are working with BT to identify and convert those lines that require work; about 300 are in scope with a similar number that are already digital. Telecare resident services have a deadline of Jan 2027 and Customer Services is leading on this element of the work, keeping their service users safe throughout the transition period.

Workstream 5: improve our digital capability

4.31 Devices - We refreshed the IT suite at the Clockhouse Community Centre (office desktops) and gifted 5 laptops to the Woolwich Common Community Centre (bought with the grant money) that are used for training and by residents who come to the centre to use devices

4.32 Retired devices – nearly 1300 corporate mobile phones that are out of service were wiped and recycled or reused; we will use the credit we receive to buy appropriate devices for residents or community centres. We have also collected devices we used for our loan and learn scheme in 2021 and we will look for ways to redistribute them sustainably.

4.33 Digital Champions: we have developed and delivered training for digital champions at two community Centres – Woolwich Common Community Centre and Clockhouse Community Centre - as part of the grant we have received. It's focused on using Learn My Way – a free platform to learn digital skills. We're now looking to establish a network of Digital Champions across the borough and we've started a Digital Inclusion Community of Practice for local authorities in the UK.

4.34 Digital training: we have delivered drop-in sessions and online safety workshops to residents as part of the Get Online Week (Woolwich Library, Slade Centre, Woolwich Common Community Centre and Clockhouse Community Centre)

4.35 Corporate Training – we've launched Cyber Awareness training in March 2024. We also ran some in person and online training sessions on OneDrive and SharePoint, focusing mostly on storing documents, collaborating online, etc.

4.36 Policy and Guidance: we have produced updated guidance and a range of digital policies this year. These range from supporting BYOD (Bring Your Own Device) – using personal smartphones for work, where a corporate phone is not justified, and AI (Artificial Intelligence) to promote responsible use of tools such as ChatGPT.

Digital investment

- 4.37 The 4-year digital investment agreed as part of MTFS in February 2021 provided for an annual resource uplift in the digital team by £5m over the MTFS period, plus a one-off capital investment. The investment aimed to enable modernisation of internal and front facing services, improving resident outcomes and generating savings. In the 2024/25 MTFS the digital investment directly contributes £1.63m of savings to the General Fund (with HRA savings calculated separately), and enables a further £2.1m in other MTFS proposals.
- 4.38 The overall investment plan aimed for £17.7m of savings by the end of year 4 (2024/25). This target will have slipped by 1 year by the end of the strategy but is now forecast to be achieved in 2025/26.

Potential – next digital strategy

4.39 We are in the process of drafting our next digital strategy. The next strategy will include a review of the last four years, and set strategic intent for the next 4 years. The context has changed a huge amount over the last few years, and the new strategy will highlight what has changed for our residents as well as what has changed for us as a team and an organisation.

5. Consultation

N/A

6. Next Steps

- 6.1 The Chair will set out closing remarks and make recommendations to the relevant decision maker as required at the meeting and these will be published as an appendix. The Relevant decision maker will respond to the recommendations in a separate published appendix and both will be brought back to the next meeting of the Committee/Panel.

7. Cross-Cutting Issues and Implications

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
<p>Legal including Human Rights Act</p>	<p>The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the Councils Digital Strategy and Cyber Security. There are no Legal or Human Rights implications arising from this report.</p>	<p>Davidaire Horsford, Interim Head of Legal Services 27.02/2025</p>
<p>Finance and other resources</p>	<p>The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the delivery of the digital strategy. As such there are no financial implications arising from this report.</p>	<p>Margaret Barrow, Accountancy Business Change Manager 24/02/25</p>
<p>Equalities</p>	<p><i>The decisions recommended through this paper have a remote or low relevance to the substance of the Equality Act. There is no apparent equality impact on end users.</i></p> <p><i>The digital strategy contributes to Council's Equality and Equity Charter and the Council's Equality Objectives 2020-2024 by reducing the digital divide that our residents experience. Specifically, all our digital services are built in an accessible way; and our digital inclusion works increases access to the internet for some of our most excluded groups.</i></p>	<p>Kit Collingwood AD, Digital and Customer Services 20/02/25</p>

<p>Climate change</p>	<p>This report makes no contribution to Greenwich Carbon Neutral Plan agreed by Cabinet on 18 November 2020</p>	<p>Kit Collingwood Assistant Director, Digital and Customer Services 20/02/25</p>
<p>Community Engagement</p>	<p>Housing repairs transformation programme: We combine analysing systems data, policy and literature with pop up research, interviews, shadowing and ideation sessions with residents, staff and other social housing providers. By triangulating findings from different sources, we distil our user research into actionable insights that enable data-driven decision-making in housing repairs. So far we have involved ~250 residents.</p> <p>Housing tenancy: The team have explored the tenant experience through focus groups and attending meetings. To understand the different operational model options, we have run interviews and site visits with other social landlords.</p> <p>Greenwich Supports Strategy (formerly known as anti-poverty strategy): Using a trauma-informed approach we worked with front-line staff, community leads and residents to inform how best our strategy can prevent those from falling further into poverty. Inspiring conversations with residents around ‘what a good life looks like’ helped us conceptualise how to design good help and create core principles around real people’s lives.</p> <p>Website: We combine Google Analytics data with regular qualitative research with website users (including those with access needs) to explore how we should design and write content tailored to help people access our council services. Through manual and automatic checks we ensure we’re compliant with WCAG 2.2 guidelines, ensuring everybody can use our website.</p> <p>Greenwich Community Directory:</p>	

	We've been co-designing the GCD with residents, front-line staff and community leads since the start which has allowed us to understand how best the GCD can support front-line staff and those with SEND by working closely with the ACE Group young people and parents.	
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8 . **Report Appendices**

8.1 The following documents are to be published with and form part of the report:

N/A

8.2 The following documents will be published after the meeting:-

- *Appendix (): Recommendations of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee*
- *Appendix (): Response to the recommendations of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee*

9. **Background Papers**

N/A

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