

DIGITAL FIRST

Cabinet Member: Cllr Lawrence Wood

Ward(s) Affected: All

Officer contact: John McMillan Ext: 3127

E-mail: john.mcmillan@wycombe.gov.uk

PROPOSED DECISION

- Cabinet to consider and adopt the vision concept.
- Subject to Cabinet's comments, approval to develop a Digital First strategy and roadmap, setting out how the vision is to be delivered.
- To present the Digital First strategy & roadmap to Cabinet in November.

Reason for Decision

The "Pounds" priority of the Corporate Plan sets the ambition for the Council to, "Continue to innovate and transform our services to provide them in the most efficient and accessible way," to achieve, " more accessible services and improved self-service options, including access to information making it easy to see how we are performing as a Council."

Additionally, as part of the requirements of the Local Government Finance Settlement Offer, the Council was required to develop and submit an Efficiency Plan, with the plan submitted to CLG in July following Cabinet approval.

One of the actions within the Efficiency Plan is to develop a:-

"Corporate business case for empowering customers through adoption of a "digital by default" and increased self-service Customer Strategy. The business case will consider the potential scope, benefits and the overall case for moving towards empowering customers through the increased use of self service and increased use of technology in service delivery."

Corporate Implications

Subject to Cabinet approval, the Digital First strategy and roadmap will be developed. Key strands that will be considered will include:-

- **The Digital Platform & Technology**

A Digital Platform will be required to support the new digital processes. The platform will join together various technologies some will be existing, and others will require investment.

- **New Skills and Capabilities**

We will need to develop new capabilities to deliver digital services. These will provide the communication, engagement and service design skills required to support the ambition.

- **Design Principles & Architecture**

To guide IT spending and to deliver a coherent systems and data strategy we will require a core set of design principles and a central shared architecture. This will ensure we can deliver efficient end-to-end processes and support service areas as they start to consider new technologies or technology upgrades. By building an agreed single view on IT we will speed up decision making, which will be bound to a clear framework.

- **Empowerment and Collaboration**

To speed up decision making and to enable us to be more proactive and fleet of foot we will need to focus on developing greater empowerment and collaboration. As an organisation, we work well together but need greater visibility and devolved decision making. This will require a review of governance processes, structure and resourcing.

- **Financial implications**

The investment required to deliver the strategy.

Executive Summary

Digital First is about more than just technology. Digital means applying the culture, practices, processes and technologies of the internet era to respond to people's raised expectations.

Digital First is an overarching strategy and is about how we as an organisation engage, communicate and respond to people, how we design and deliver services and how we use information to make decisions, inform policy and evaluate performance and outcomes – a joined up and consistent approach across the organisation to how we work and the supporting technologies, applications and data we hold and use.

Digital First is the next step in the major transformational journey that we have been on as an organisation for several years. Though driven by austerity, the work we have done to streamline the organisation and our processes has been exceptional, and now we are looking to capitalise on that success by optimising WDC to become a centre of excellence among local government organisations for customer service, operational efficiency, and financial autonomy.

Appendix A sets out a vision and key themes for Digital First.

Sustainable Community Strategy/Council Priorities - Implications

The “Pounds” priority of the Corporate Plan sets the ambition for the Council to, “Continue to innovate and transform our services to provide them in the most efficient and accessible way,” to achieve, “ more accessible services and improved self-service options, including access to information making it easy to see how we are performing as a Council.”

Background and Issues

Government and Local Government has consistently adopted technology and digital tools to support and develop services.

WDC’s experience and approach to technology is similar to that of the wider public sector and has emerged and evolved over time with changes in technology, service demands and service transformation.

Recently, and unlike the majority of other district Councils, WDC has embraced cloud and virtualised technologies; the majority of servers and desktops have been virtualised and most of our hardware is located off-site in third party data-centres. With these changes, the Council has become less location dependent and the performance of services accessed remotely has significantly improved. With the changes implemented, the Council is in a position to take further advantage of technology advances including Software as a Service (SaaS) and Infrastructure or Platform as a Service (IaaS or PaaS).

A new mobile friendly website was implemented last year and a number of e-forms have been introduced for high volume services. Steps have also been taken, in a variety of internal and external service setting, to replace paper with “electronic” processes (e.g. e-mailing soft copy forms). This, typically, this has simply replicated the existing process and often leads to the need for additional data entry, manipulation and officer interventions.

Over the last few years the adoption of VDI has improved users remote access to their accounts and applications. Smart devices have been and are being adopted, allowing officers access to and to collect information away from the offices. Increasingly line of business applications are providing “apps” that support officers to collect information whilst away from the offices, with the information automatically transferred to back office systems. For example, with the recent upgrade to the Uniform system, approaches to the use of “apps” in Building Control and Planning are actively being commissioned.

However, developments in services, service provision and line of business applications have typically been undertaken within services themselves. There is no single view of customer, although individual datasets are held within service line of business applications.

In response to financial challenges, particularly from 2010 onwards, ICT & CSC, like other services, worked to reduce costs. The Capita managed service ICT & CSC

contracts (starting in Feb 2015) reduced costs by £1.72m over the first 5 year term of the contract. Hardware and software applications have been sustained to (and sometimes, beyond) support “shelf-lives.” Issues with service provision during the first 18 months of the contract also delayed implementation of infrastructure improvement projects. (As service has stabilised, and following the work of the I&R ICT Task & Finish Group, considered by Cabinet in September 2016, projects have been accelerated and are now in delivery).

Similar to other Councils the majority of customer contacts are now made on-line (the profile of website contacts is similar to that of other District Councils). However, the majority of these are information rather than transaction based. On-line transactions using e-forms although increasing in use, since Capita’s tenure as CSC provider, remain relatively modest in terms of contact volumes.

Telephone remains a significant channel used by customers, representing 75% of contact made through the CSC. The Council receives the same volume of calls to DDI numbers (back office services) as it does through the CSC (the CSC manages c20% of all customer contacts).

The number of customers visiting the Council in person has steadily fallen over time and has been managed with the introduction of the appointments system for Revenues & Benefits.

“Digital by default,” coined in the Government’s Digital Strategy published in December 2012 emphasised the financial efficiencies to be gained by the shift to on-line and digital channels and had the ambition to redesign digital services “to make them so straight forward and convenient that all those who can use them prefer to do so.”

This recognised the impact and step change in the way people live their lives, interact and want to interact with service providers (including public services) using technology and smart devices.

Digital services at WDC remain ancillary to the more traditional channels for service delivery.

ICT is integral to the Council’s delivery of service and an important tool in enabling change. The level of dependence on ICT in the delivery of service and strategic objectives continues to grow to the point where the Council cannot function without ICT for even short periods of time. Investment is required on a regular basis to maintain and update ICT infrastructure in order to achieve dependable and resilient services.

Reliable, dependable and consistent ICT is a pre-requisite to good customer service (to both internal and external customers).

Digital First

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Consultation

To inform the development of the Digital First strategy, (and working with Eduserv) we have met with stakeholders from across the organisation in order to develop a vision. Meetings have been held with Members and service representatives exploring where we are now, how we have delivered against our corporate and service plans, what has worked well, barriers we have encountered and future ambitions.

Further consultation will be undertaken with Members, services and stakeholders to support the development of the Digital First strategy and roadmap.

Next Steps

Subject to Cabinet approval, to develop the Digital First strategy & roadmap and present it to Cabinet at the meeting scheduled for November.

Background Papers

Digital by Default (SMB, 7th February 2017).