

# TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

## CABINET

04 April 2023

### Report of the Director of Finance and Transformation

#### Part 1- Public

#### Executive Non Key Decisions

#### **1 OUTCOMES AND ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE IT STRATEGY AND DIGITAL STRATEGY**

**This report is focused on informing Members of the impact the Council's IT and Digital strategies have had on the organisation over the last 4-year period. Both strategies were customer-centric (residents and businesses) and aligned to underpin the Council's ambition to improve the customer experience in terms of quality and the efficiency of the services provided.**

**This report highlights the measurable outcomes against the overall vision set within the strategies. These outcomes also exemplify the pragmatism and foresight adopted by the Council which has enabled the organisation to adopt these ambitious and transformative strategies in such a short timescale.**

**A short powerpoint presentation will be given at the meeting by the Head of IT.**

#### **1.1 Introduction**

- 1.1.1 The IT strategy was initially approved by Members in June 2018 covering the four year period 2018 to 2022. Subsequently, in January 2021 it was refreshed and 'rolled on' one year until 2023 in order to align with the Digital Strategy.
- 1.1.2 The Digital Strategy was adopted in June 2019 to cover a 4 year period through to 2023.
- 1.1.3 The Digital strategy consisted of five core priorities (One council, Efficient Workforce, Demand Management, Economic Growth and Smart Borough) and was primarily focused on various challenges faced by the Council, including meeting customer expectation, increasing service demand, diminishing resources and the 'Green' agenda.
- 1.1.4 The IT strategy was focused around enabling the corporate and digital strategies through secure, resilient, and highly available infrastructure, whilst ensuring best value with a reduced carbon footprint.
- 1.1.5 Adoption of these strategies were enabled through a number of key projects over the last 4 years. These included significant changes to the technical

infrastructure, business systems and processes involving not only IT but also both front, middle and back-office functions.

- 1.1.6 As Members will note, both strategies are now coming to the end of their life. This report gives Cabinet an update on the achievements and highlights of the two strategies, and also sets out those matters that need to be carried over into future strategies.

## 1.2 Outcomes

- 1.2.1 In developing and adopting the IT and Digital strategies the Council was able to cater for, meet and mitigate the key challenges faced by the authority since 2019 in the form of:
- preparedness to mitigate potential service disruptions due to Brexit (Operation Stack),
  - the lockdowns during the pandemic,
  - a major power outage caused by fire in April 2020, and
  - the energy price hike due to the conflict in Ukraine.
- 1.2.2 The Council is now able to adopt a remote working policy to enable all required staff to work remotely without compromising customer and user experience. Statistics show that the IT infrastructure is now catering for almost 95% of staff to be able to work remotely. Adoption of a Remote Working Policy by the General Purposes Committee has enabled the organisation to geographically widen its potential to recruit staff.
- 1.2.3 Migrating the telephony and email systems to cloud has enabled the Council to improve and maintain its key communication channels at 99.9% availability since January 2020.
- 1.2.4 Due to the adoption of a secure 'by design' approach embedded within both digital and IT strategies, the Council is able to defend against the cyber threats faced by public sector organisations across the country in the form of ransomware and malware. This has been verified by the successful achievement of Cyber Essentials certification for Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council in November 2022.
- 1.2.5 As a result of migrating the Council's website to a 'cloud hosted' JADU platform and introducing the new customer portal feature, we have enabled our residents and businesses to engage with all services digitally. The statistics shows that there is a staggering 51% increase in the self-service cases across the Council since the adoption of the digital strategy.
- 1.2.6 Our customers are able to manage all their queries and service requirements within their 'My TMBC Account', which enables them to access all council related information and transactions that only applies to them from a single account via an

App on their smartphones or the I website. Statistics show that there is a steady and rapid growth in the take up 'My Account' which currently has 31,077 subscribers. 6,400 of them are accessing the services via the mobile App, of which 4,400 subscribers have opted for push notifications. It is also worthwhile noting that there has been no negative feedback to date from the Mobile App users. In industry standards this shows greater confidence amongst our users.

- 1.2.7 The primary contributors to the positive customer experience of the Council's digital channels are the user-friendliness of the system and robustness of the infrastructure it is hosted on. The statistics shows that the availability of the website and the customer portal is being maintained at 100% since its launch in June 2021.
- 1.2.8 The Council's contact centre is able adopt a predictive analytic approach to manage its resource demand and availability due to the newly adopted 'Anywhere365' (AW365) contact management system. AW365 provides a platform for the Council to deal with residents' queries and transactions more efficiently via our multiskilled customer services team and getting calls to the right person first time with skills-based routing and redirecting to a digital platform. Statics show that first-time right calls are currently maintained at 96%.
- 1.2.9 By migrating the data centre to cloud, the Council has successfully managed to reduce its annual hosting carbon footprint by 73% equating to 34 kilotonnes per annum. This has been a key contributor to the Council's climate change targets.
- 1.2.10 Also due to migration to cloud, despite the significant increase in the cost of energy, the council has been able sustain its electric consumption in terms of hosting its data centre at a considerably low level comparatively. Based on the historical usage the saving equates up to £53k per annum
- 1.2.11 The 'Smart Borough' priority within the digital strategy is key to the Council meeting its future demands and improving the quality of life for the residents. As Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council (TMBC) does not have ownership of key assets required for the smart borough agenda, such as street furniture, roads, etc, this can only be achieved through partnership with other relevant authorities within Kent. TMBC has played a key role in initiating and establishing the 'Smart Kent & Medway' group involving Kent County Council and other district councils. The group focuses on exploiting technologies such as 'Internet of Things' (IoT) and other sensor-based solutions to tackle social, educational, environmental, health, housing, traffic and other challenges faced by local governments within the county.
- 1.2.12 Whilst there have been great inroads made on the overall Digital strategy and some significant outcomes as set out above, the 'Economic Growth' and 'Smart Borough' priorities will require to be carried over and factored into the next Digital & IT strategy 2023-27.
- 1.2.13 Work on the new Strategy will commence in the next few months and a draft brought to Members later in the year for consideration.

### **1.3 Summary**

- 1.3.1 It is worth reflecting that the IT and Digital strategies were ambitious but as Members will note as a result of their adoption, some significant achievements have been made. There are still more improvements that can be made and these ambitions will be factored into the new Strategy which will be brought forward for Members' consideration later in the year.
- 1.3.2 At the time, the Council did take bold steps in adopting these strategies, but hopefully Cabinet will agree that this has reaped rewards in helping to transform the Council.
- 1.3.3 The Head of IT will give a short powerpoint presentation at the meeting to illustrate the achievements.

### **1.4 Legal Implications**

- 1.4.1 All of systems and changes adopted were within the local government legislative guidelines and in compliance with GDPR.

### **1.5 Financial and Value for Money Considerations**

- 1.5.1 All procurements were carried out in line with the government guidelines and where necessary through the Crown Commercial Services (CCS) frameworks such as G-Cloud.

### **1.6 Risk Assessment**

- 1.6.1 Like all organisations, the Council is reliant on IT systems to deliver its services. The progress made through these strategies has reduced the risks to the authority significantly.
- 1.6.2 Digital solutions can help to manage demand pressures and make limited resources/capacity go further. However reliance on digital services can also bring risks. If services are down for prolonged periods, productivity of staff is compromised as are services to the public. Disaster Recovery measures are therefore imperative.
- 1.6.3 Corporate strategies, goals and priorities need to align and support each other. The IT Strategy supports the activities and goals set by the Council. Without a clearly defined strategy we may not be able to prioritise our resources correctly, leading to missed opportunities to improve service delivery and reduce costs.
- 1.6.4 As the reliance on IT systems becomes even greater, opportunities are continuously explored to mitigate risks further.
- 1.6.5 In terms of cyber security, training is regularly pushed out to all staff. The Council was successful in the achievement of Cyber Essentials certification in November 2022.

## **1.7 Policy Considerations**

- 1.7.1 Remote working
- 1.7.2 Device policy
- 1.7.3 Business Continuity/Resilience
- 1.7.4 Information Governance
- 1.7.5 Data protection
- 1.7.6 Customer Contact
- 1.7.7 Human Resources

## **1.8 Equality Impact Assessment**

- 1.8.1 The decisions recommended through this paper have a remote or low relevance to the substance of the Equality Act. There is no perceived impact on end users.

## **1.9 Recommendation**

- 1.9.1 Cabinet is **RECOMMENDED** to:

- 1) Note the outcomes and achievements of both the Digital Strategy 2019-2023 and the IT Strategy 2018-2023; and
- 2) Agree that a new “Corporate IT and Digital Strategy” be developed and presented to Members of the Cabinet for consideration later in this calendar year.

Background papers:

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Nil

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