

Committee(s): Policy, Resource and Economic Development Committee	Date: 16 December 2020
Subject: Digital Strategy	Wards Affected: All
Report of: Steve Summers, Chief Operating Officer	Public
Report Author: Name: Tim Huggins, ICT Manager Telephone: 01277 312500 E-mail: tim.huggins@brentwood.gov.uk	For Decision

Summary

The Council's Corporate Strategy 2020-25 was adopted in January 2020 and outlined the Council's key corporate priorities and objectives. This report seeks approval from Members to adopt a Digital Strategy 2020-2025, which will complement and underpin the Corporate Strategy.

Recommendation(s)

Members are asked to:

- R1.** Approve the Digital Strategy 2020-2025 contained within Appendix A
- R2.** Agree for Officers to develop an action plan for delivery of the Digital Strategy, progress of which will be fed back to relevant committees.

Main Report

Introduction and Background

1. The Council's Corporate strategy 2020-2025 was adopted in January 2020 and defines the Council's priorities for the next 5 years. Critical to the delivery of this strategy is a set of supporting strategies that assist with delivery of these priorities.
2. Demand on digital services is growing and has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. This has meant that some of the priorities within this strategy have started to be delivered to support Customer and Staff needs during these difficult times.
3. Within the 'Corporate Strategy Update and Recovery Planning 2020-21' report, presented to Policy, Resource and Economic Development Committee on 9 September, several Recovery Actions were agreed. Development of a Digital Strategy was one such action.

4. The Digital Strategy 2020-25 sets to provide overarching direction to the Councils plans to explore the use technology to enable organisational and service transformation. This will be critical to ensuring the Council can deliver the best digital experience to Officers, Members and Customers. The strategy also sets to enable the realisation of digital efficiency savings.
5. The Councils 'Customer Access Strategy' expired in 2019, and this has been incorporated into the Digital Strategy 2020-25. This will enable Council services to strategically align resources for the best outcome for our customers.
6. 'Digital' First is not digital only, it's about choice. The principle is to provide adaptable service delivery so our customers who are able, can contact us using digital methods. This will release Officer time allowing us to prioritise contact with those most in need and on the most appropriate channel.
7. The Digital Strategy 2020-25 identifies three core themes:
 - a. Customer Experience
 - b. Data, Security and Process
 - c. Employee Experience
8. These have been identified as the 'building blocks' to enable the broadest range of outcomes.
9. Each theme provides a set of priorities that will deliver effective change in the way we support and deliver our services.
10. Following adoption, Officers, along with a set of 'Digital Champions' will establish an action plan to support the delivery of this strategy.
11. COVID-19 has stress tested our systems and a rapid response using digital technologies was required to support service delivery. We responded by producing an agile action plan that enabled Officers to react swiftly to a constantly changing environment as the response to the pandemic unfolded. Phase 1 of our digital journey had strongly positioned the Council to react and adapt. The following are some of the achievements so far that enabled service delivery to continue:
 - a. Introduction of live streamed Virtual meetings

- b. Rollout of Microsoft Teams for virtual office meetings and collaboration. This kept Officers in contact during lockdown and supported well-being keeping colleagues connected.
- c. Provision of standard device to all Council Members to support virtual council meetings and “future digital councillor” services.
- d. Expanded our cyber security
- e. Mass working from home required quickly adapting technical support services
- f. Expanded online forms
- g. Introduction of hybrid council meetings supporting the varying needs of Council Members and Officers
- h. Introduced a performance management framework to monitor and support delivery of the Corporate Strategy which included the early stages of creating corporate dashboard to provide easier access to business intelligence.
- i. Introduction of new communications such as the GovDelivery updates taken up by 15,000 subscribers and help increase MyBrentwood signups increase a further 5,000
- j. Implemented a fully remote Contact Centre to enable completely uninterrupted customer services
- k. Creation of a dedicated Coronavirus webpage on the Council’s website to provide information and updates in a single place. This page has, to date, received over 15,000 views
- l. Natural reduction in printing due to COVID-19 has demonstrated that digital works and reduced printing through the implementation of a number of paperless processes (such as Planning application validation). Such processes have also removed the need for Officers to attend the Office.

Reasons for Recommendation

12. This strategy is critical to delivery of the Corporate Strategy and Business and Recovery Plan. It will also ensure that Council services are modern, innovative and fit for purpose.

Consultation

13. A series of consultation exercises with the Council’s Extended Leadership Team and Senior Leadership Team have been undertaken and have assisted with the development of this strategy.

References to Corporate Plan

14. The Digital Strategy supports delivery of the Council's Corporate Strategy 2020-25, and the Council's Business and Recovery Plan. The strategy naturally aligns with the 'Delivering an efficient and effective Council' theme but will influence delivery of projects against a wide range of Corporate priorities.

Implications

Financial Implications

Name/Title: Jacqueline Van Mellaerts, Corporate Director (Finance & Resources) and Section 151 Officer

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Ensuring the Council has a robust digital strategy is essential, especially during unprecedented times when majority of Council office staff are predominantly working from home. Service managers will use existing resources to ensure there is no revenue pressures, however it is expected that the strategy will drive out efficiencies as part of the Corporate plan. The Capital programme already includes schemes for ICT strategy and hardware and it is intended the digital strategy will align the require resources over the 5-year cycle as part of the budget setting process to feed into the Medium-Term Financial Strategy.

Legal Implications

Name & Title: Amanda Julian, Head of Legal Service and Monitoring Officer

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The Council must have due regard to its Public Sector Equality Duty under s149 Equality Act 2010 when making decisions that may affect those with protected characteristics. By ensuring that people have a choice and can if they are unable to access digitally can use other methods ensures that this has been considered.

The Council will need to consider and implement any Data Protection requirements to ensure that the data collected is done so under the provisions of the Data Protection Act 2018 and the applied GDPR.

Economic Implications

Name/Title: Phil Drane, Corporate Director (Planning & Economy)

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There are no direct economic implications. It is important that the Council can shift to a more digital presence in line with local businesses for more efficient services, which may have indirect local economic benefits.

Background Papers

None

Appendices to this report

Appendix A – Draft Digital Strategy 2020-2025