Organisation Scrutiny Committee

31 August 2021

MINUTE EXTRACT

OSC/ 23/2 1-22

Scrutiny Review - ICT and Transformation

The Portfolio Holder for Leisure, Transformation and Climate Change, and the Joint Head of Transformation and Organisation were present at the meeting to discuss the Council's ICT Digital Transformation.

Members received a presentation and heard that the Council had set out its transformation vision through a number of strategic documents including the Council Plan, Carbon Reduction Plan, Leadership Programme, and Digital Transformation Strategy.

The presentation outlined the significant progress made on the delivery of the Council's Digital Transformation Strategy, which included a broad area of work spanning a number of different departments and directly impacted customers, residents and businesses. The Committee noted that digital transformation presented an opportunity to improve Council Services whilst reducing costs.

Members were informed about a number of significant Digital Transformation projects and achievements which included a multi-channel solution to the contact centre with webchat implemented (and email next); increased the number of forms and services available on self-service from 14 transactions in 2018 to over 80 which were available and accessible on all digital devices; improved online services for businesses; free digital training for residents aged 50 and above; and a PSN (Public Services Network) accreditation obtained for 2021.

The Joint Head of Transformation and Organisation commented that the Council had been able to operate more effectively throughout the Pandemic due to the existing digital infrastructure that had been put in place. The Pandemic had accelerated the Council's digital transformation.

The Committee enquired about the potential for system outages. The officer stated that whilst it was possible, a full system outage was unlikely. Members heard that in the past 12 months, there had been one major outage that lasted 4 hours and only affected emails. All Council data was 'backed up' and there was a shift planned for data to be stored in the cloud so that it was not held locally.

The Committee agreed that it was important for residents who were not computer literate to still receive support. The Joint Head of Transformation and Organisation commented that residents could still call the contact centres and that the Council was not removing services, but instead 'channel shifting' and encouraging users to use digital services. It was stated, for example, that

Universal Credit was entirely digital, and the Council provided digital assistance to users.

The Portfolio Holder for Leisure, Transformation and Climate Change discussed how the Council currently communicated with residents who were unable to access the internet. Those mediums of communication included newsletters and magazines which were posted to every house in the District on a quarterly basis, and press releases to newspapers and radio. Surveys were also used, however, the Portfolio Holder acknowledged that their success was limited.

The Committee discussed productivity and home working. In this context, Members were reminded that employees were still expected to be managed at home similarly to the office, albeit remotely by their line managers. The officer explained that although measuring any change to productivity through home working was difficult, there were some obvious benefits such as reduced travel to the office.

Members heard that the Authority still believed that social interaction was important to workplace culture, and as such although some employees were at home, they should not be isolated. Potential changes to the Mill Lane offices were discussed that could better accommodate hybrid working, and it was hoped there would be some technological solution to socially re-connect teams that were working remotely.

The Committee discussed the savings and costs to the Authority of the Digital Transformation. The Portfolio Holder for Leisure, Transformation and Climate Change commented that some savings were difficult to calculate, as a cost that could arise out of one budget could make savings for another department. It was agreed that Members were to be provided with a report which outlined direct costs to the overall budget.

Members had a wide ranging discussion on scoping the Scrutiny Review which included reviewing the user experience (for customers, staff and Members), reviewing the digital infrastructure and digital connectivity in the District, and Members IT.

RESOLVED – That the update be noted.