

**NORTH EAST DERBYSHIRE
DISTRICT COUNCIL**



**North East
Derbyshire**
District Council

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

ICT & TRANSFORMATION

MAY 2022

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Chair's Foreword

I am delighted to present this report describing the work of the Organisation Scrutiny Committee. It details the findings, conclusions and recommendations of the Committee from its scrutiny review into ICT & Transformation.

The Committee felt that a review was timely given the pandemic's impact on digital services and how this was affecting our residents and staff. I, like other Members, have been impressed at the scale of transformation to our digital services which has taken place at the Council to improve our services whilst continuing to support our customers.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Committee for their input and also the stakeholders who helped inform the review. I would also like to thank the Senior Scrutiny Officer for his support of the Committee's work and Democratic Services for the help they have provided.

Councillor Steven Clough
Chair of Organisation Scrutiny Committee

Review Panel

The review panel comprised the following members:

Councillor S Clough	-	(Conservative) – Review Panel Chair
Councillor J Birkin	-	(Labour)
Councillor M Jones	-	(Labour)
Councillor D Drabble	-	(Conservative)
Councillor H Liggett	-	(Conservative)
Councillor D Ruff	-	(Conservative)
Councillor J Funnell	-	(Independent)
Councillor P Kerry	-	(Labour)
Councillor P Wright	-	(Conservative)

1. Recommendations

That the Council:

- 1.1 Considers a dedicated and centralised budget for Digital Transformation;
- 1.2 Considers a cloud based system for staff IT such as Microsoft 365 which would bring it in line with other local authorities;
- 1.3 Considers a single 'sign on' system to streamline and simplify online services; and
- 1.4 Considers a partnership with Citizens Advice to potentially use the Mill Lane Council Chamber as a 'community hub' venue.

2. Introduction

- 2.1 At its meeting on 06 July 2021, the Organisation Scrutiny Committee agreed to undertake a review on ICT and Transformation.
- 2.2 The review panel felt as though the review was timely given the accelerated move towards full digital services following the pandemic.
- 2.3 The review sought to focus on the needs of the customer, specifically residents and staff who were increasingly using digital services.

3. Scope of Review

- 3.1 The review aimed to:
 - Review what services were currently available digitally;
 - Review how services had been implemented and what measures the Council has taken to ensure customers have access to services;
 - Ensure customers' needs were being considered in the digital transformation of our services;
 - Review the impact on IT through the pandemic and how this affected service areas and what adjustments were implemented to meet the new environment needs; and
 - Identify any further improvements that could be made.

4. Method of Review

- 4.1 The review panel met on six occasions to consider the scope of the review, key issues they wanted to discuss and key people they wished to interview.
- 4.2 Evidence was gathered in a variety of ways including written sources, surveys and interviews with a range of stakeholders.

5. Evidence and Research

5.1 A number of documents and evidence were provided to the review panel for consideration. Details are provided below:

- Scene Setting Presentation by the Portfolio Holder for Leisure, Transformation and Climate Change, and the Director of Transformation.
- NEDDC Digital Services Survey 2020.
- NEDDC Digital Transformation Strategy.
- NEDDC Citizens' Panel Summary Report Nov 2021
- Customer data and feedback from NEDDC services.
- Data provided by Citizens Advice North East Derbyshire and Mid Mercia CA.
- Interviews with internal officers and external partners.

6. Key Findings

6.1 Strengths/Observations

6.1.1 The Review Panel noted that digital transformation was a broad area of work which spanned a different number of departments and directly impacted residents, staff and businesses. It presented an opportunity to improve Council services whilst reducing costs. The Committee heard 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, and that the pandemic had accelerated the Council's digital transformation.

6.1.2 Members interviewed a number of service managers including the Revenues and Benefits Manager, the Environmental Health Manager, the Communications and Marketing Manager, the Projects Development Manager, and the Customer Services Manager. All were making good progress on digital transformation whilst ensuring that the needs of their customers were met.

6.1.3 The Projects and Development Manager outlined the progress made towards digital services, and Members noted how the Council Plan target to ensure that 50% of transactions were being made through digital channels was currently being met. In Q1 of 2021/22 50.48% of transactions were conducted digitally. The Review Panel also heard about the in-house development team who had contributed to numerous digital projects, and in some circumstances had saved the Council significant amounts of money when compared with outsourcing.

A wide variety of digital projects had and were taking place which primarily focused on either self-service (such as pest control or reporting a missing bin collection) or transactional (such as Council Tax or rent payment) arrangements through digital means. These digital projects were being expanded across all service areas, and the service managers interviewed gave an extensive overview of digital transformation taking place in their

service areas. This ranged from mobile inspection platforms and online covid certification in Environmental Health, to applications for housing benefit and council tax reductions online, to webchat support from customer services and cashless payments at the District Council Offices.

- 6.1.4 The Review Panel agreed that the focus was largely on 'channel shifting' and encouraging users to use digital services, whilst maintaining traditional forms of communication. It was stated, for example, that main forms of communication such as telephone and face-to-face contact would remain in place with support also given to residents who struggled with digital technology. For example, universal credit was entirely digital, and the Council provided assistance to users who had difficulties with their applications. Customer Services also played a significant role in continuing to support residents regardless of the customers' preferred method of communication. The Committee heard of numerous examples in which the Council had supported vulnerable residents' access digital services aided by the self-help PC in reception and staff.

The Digital Services Survey outlined that only 6 out of 130 residents surveyed would not use digital services, and that this number was continuing to decrease as the Council promoted its digital services and residents became more confident with their digital skills, particularly in older residents.

- 6.1.5 The Committee interviewed Gillian Sladen, CEO of Citizens Advice, and Liz Holt, Development Manager at Citizens Advice Mid Mercia in regards to the Digital Connect Project. The project was funded through the Healthy North East Derbyshire (HNED) Partnership and delivered by Citizens Advice and Mid Mercia CA. The project supported residents over the age of 50 throughout North East Derbyshire through a person centred 1:1 approach which has helped level up and strengthen skills in the community, reduce digital exclusion, reduced social isolation and has improved mental health.

Members heard that 131 face-to-face sessions had been conducted, and that feedback from the project suggested that 100% of clients felt more confident after the sessions and that 89% of clients had expressed reduced social isolation and increased connectivity. The service included a tablet loan service and was looking to expand their community based venues, with plans to open up venues at Killamarsh, Dronfield and Holmewood.

The Committee was impressed with the project and how it was helping residents in the District and discussed a potential partnership so that the Council could promote the project more widely. This included customer services referring residents to the project, and the use of the Council Chamber as a community based venue for hosting 1:1 sessions. Members noted that it had already been promoted in the Council's 'The News' publication.

- 6.1.6 The Improvement Officer informed the Committee about how the Authority was constantly improving services and making them more digitally accessible. Members heard about the reasonable adjustments and hate crime forms which were now available online, as well as the new website being 92%

accessible with a reading age of 11. The Authority had also signed up to the BSL Charter and had a video relay service with a BSL interpreter that residents were able to utilise.

- 6.1.7 The Communications Marketing and Design Manager also discussed 'how to' videos which were to be published on YouTube. The videos were instructional videos on how residents could access digital services. Members agreed that this could be a useful tool for residents and its expansion considered and included on other traditional methods of communication such as council tax leaflets.
- 6.1.8 The Committee was updated on the 'do it yourself' section which was available and used by staff. This was constantly being updated with a wide variety of information and services that could be done by staff members, as well as information provided on the extranet.

Areas for Improvement/Observations

- 6.2.1 The Review Panel were informed by multiple stakeholders that there was no central budget for digital transformation, and digital projects were instead funded through individual departmental budgets or the need to bid for capital funding. Members expressed concern that given the pace of digital transformation at the Authority, this would not allow it to accurately reflect the costs involved. The Council could consider a centralised and dedicated budget which would be easier to manage and ensure costs are minimalised through identifying economies of scale, along with the necessity of need/following alternative avenues.
- 6.2.2 The Committee heard about current IT provisions for staff at NEDDC, as well as comparisons with other local authorities. Whilst Members agreed that the current provisions had generally worked well for staff throughout the pandemic, a cloud based or centralised communication system such as Microsoft 365 would bring the Council in-line with others and be more suited to the agile working policy that it had introduced.
- 6.2.3 A 'single sign-on system' which gave residents complete access by linking services such as revenues and the Council's self-service could greatly improve the customer experience by streamlining the Council's digital services to residents and making them available all in one place. This could further encourage those who were hesitant towards digitalisation by simplifying the process and making it easier to help those who struggled. Members did, however, note the high costs involved with such a process, but agreed that the Council could see it as an investment to improve uptake on digital services.
- 6.2.4 The evidence given by service managers pointed towards high costs that could be upwards of £26,000 in some cases. The Review Panel considered this as a clear barrier to success, but noted that savings could be made by

expanding the in-house development team as opposed to outsourcing third party forms.

- 6.2.5 Members agreed that significant challenges remained in reaching out to residents who were hesitant in accessing digital services. The Committee heard from a number of service managers who were promoting their services adequately, mainly through the website but also in bills, leaflets and newsletters. The Digital Services Survey 2020 outlined that for those who did not use the internet, the main reasons for not using digital based services were a lack of skills (62%) and a lack of confidence (41%), despite the vast majority of those surveyed having access to the internet (90% of those surveyed). This suggests that regardless of promotional activities, there was a significant number of residents who would not use digital services and would continue to use traditional methods unless they were willing to engage in training. Members therefore acknowledged that future progress on increasing the use of digital channels could slow down.

In light of this, the Review Panel considered the digital connect project as an important area of work which could address the issues some residents were experiencing surrounding a lack of confidence and skills.

Members were given an overview of the project, and as previously mentioned its aims were to address some of the issues that the Digital Skills Survey had highlighted. The Committee was impressed with the project and felt that it could be promoted more widely by the Authority. The project was cost neutral to the Council and funded externally through the Healthy North East Derbyshire (HNED) Partnership. This funding, however, was time limited.

There was a consensus that the Council could assist by offering the Council Chamber at Mill Lane as a community hub venue, as well as it being a point of referral for customer services who had come across a customer who was lacking IT skills. The Authority could also consider a similar project in the future.

7. Conclusions

- 7.1 The Review Panel heard from a range of stakeholders during the review process. The review identified a number of strengths in regards to how the Council was implementing its digital transformation strategy, whilst continuing to support the needs of residents and staff and ensuring continued access to services for all. Members were impressed with the scale of transformation that had taken place.
- 7.2 There was, however, some areas for improvement involving provisions for staff IT, streamlining and simplifying online services, and upskilling residents so that they had the skills and confidence to use digital services.

Appendix A

Stakeholders Engaged During the Review

- **Councillor Jeremy Kenyon – Portfolio Holder for Transformation, Leisure and Climate Change**
- **Matt Broughton – Director of Transformation**
- **Kristen O Gorman – Projects and Development Manager**
- **Rachel Pope – Customer Services Manager**
- **Matt Finn – Environmental Health Services Manager**
- **Andrew Gascoigne – Revenues and Benefits Manager**
- **David Vickers – Communications Marketing and Design Manager**
- **Amar Bashir – Improvement Officer**
- **Steve Lee – Strategic Partnership Co-ordinator**
- **Gillian Sladen – CEO of Citizens Advice North East Derbyshire**
- **Liz Holt – Development Manager at Citizens Advice Mid Mercia**