

THE VALE OF GLAMORGAN COUNCIL

GOVERNANCE AND AUDIT COMMITTEE: 22<sup>ND</sup> APRIL, 2024

REFERENCE FROM CORPORATE PERFORMANCE AND RESOURCES  
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE: 20<sup>TH</sup> MARCH, 2024

“958 DIGITAL STRATEGY REVIEW - VALE OF GLAMORGAN COUNCIL (DCR) -

The report was presented by Ian Phillips, Audit Wales, the purpose of which was to advise Members of the findings of Audit Wales’s review of the Council’s Digital Strategy.

As part of the Council’s annual audit work programme for 2023, the Auditor General for Wales undertook a review of the Council’s Digital Strategy. This review had been carried out across all Welsh Authorities, with a focus on seeking assurance that the Councils’ approach to digital would help to deliver well-being objectives in a way that secured value for money in the use of resources; providing assurance that Councils were acting in accordance with the sustainable development principle in the design of their strategies; explaining how Councils were using/planning to use digital technology to meet people’s needs and deliver better outcomes; and look to inspire and empower Welsh Councils and other public sector bodies by identifying and sharing examples of notable practice/approaches where relevant.

There were a number of findings from the review, attached at Appendix A to the report, ranging from the Council had taken the sustainable development principle into account in producing its digital strategy, and was developing arrangements to deliver the strategy, but monitoring arrangements were under-developed; through to the Council had a clear vision for using digital technology and had considered how its approach to digital impacted on other things it was trying to achieve but had not articulated how it impacted on other public bodies, amongst others.

Five recommendations had been made to the strengthen Council’s strategic approach to digital, ranging from the digital strategy taking into account current and future trends (‘horizon scanning’) through to the Council monitoring the value for money of its digital strategy and identify any potential savings. In response to the recommendations, the Director of Corporate Resources and Head of Digital had developed an action plan which would be progressed by the Council.

Following the presentation of the report the following comments or queries were made at the meeting.

On the Chair’s query concerning what the Vale of Glamorgan Council could learn from the reviews undertaken for other Welsh Local Authorities, it was explained that a national, all-Wales report would be produced that would point to areas and examples of good practice, with reports on the individual authorities also published online.

The Chair referred to the need to develop horizon scanning further and how this could be achieved. In response, the Head of Digital pointed to the work already being undertaken with a number of different bodies, such as the Welsh Local Government Association and the Centre for Digital Public Services, as part of looking at current and future needs for local residents and with a short through to longer term focus included in the Council's Corporate Plan.

On Councillor Carroll's point concerning the report including a further emphasis on the use of Artificial Intelligence (A.I.) and the opportunities this could bring to the Council, including the use of external sources to help and advise on exploiting these, it was explained that this would be considered to help supplement the organisational response in the report and strategy concerning A.I. It was also noted that a new Head of Digital had been recruited who would help to develop a future model for digital services and build up digital skills within the Council's workforce.

Councillor Carroll added that it was important that the Council took on board the lessons to learned in terms of procurement and delivering projects (such as with Oracle) as part of this strategy, in order to ensure better project management, value for money and avoiding any major budgetary issues.

Councillor Dr. Johnson raised a number of comments and queries, including looking forward to the national all-Wales report on this matter being published in order to look at the lessons learnt, the report/strategy he felt was too abstract for non-technical, lay readers, which meant he was not sure where the Council was going in terms of its recommendations and next steps; plus, he referred to the recommendation on avoiding duplication and what Audit Wales wanted the Council to do in terms of working with partners, etc. Although he understood the process, he did not understand the content of the strategy and report and what the Council would be doing differently going forward. He also pointed out a typographical error on page 2 of the Organisational Response Form (Appendix B to the report), concerning the organisational response and the completion date for ensuring the Head of Digital was a member of the Strategic Leadership Team needed to be amended (it was currently showing as January 2023). It was explained that in terms of working with partners, this was not prescriptive but rather the report suggested that the Council and partners explore areas of collaboration, such as pooling resources and other joint arrangements in respect of developing and implementing digital services. The 22 Welsh Authorities were also all at different stages of implementing their digital strategies. Furthermore, the Council had undertaken a first review in order to create a road map to bring to Committee and Cabinet on the areas of strength for the Council and real-life examples in developing and utilising digital services and technologies through collaboration and partnerships to deliver efficiencies and better outcomes, ranging from potholes to social care.

Scrutiny Committee, having considered the report and all the issues and implications contained therein,

## RECOMMENDED –

(1) T H A T the findings arising from the review of the Council's Digital Strategy (Appendix A), the response to the review findings and Audit Wales's recommendations (Appendix B) be noted.

(2) T H A T the report be referred to Governance and Audit Committee and thereafter to Cabinet for their oversight and endorsement of the proposed Council actions (Appendix B) to address the recommendations, with the following comments from Scrutiny:

- The report should include further emphasis on the use of Artificial Intelligence (A.I.) and the opportunities this could bring to the Council, including the use of external sources to help and advise on exploiting these.
- To build on the Audit Wales recommendation concerning the importance of developing Horizon Scanning to inform its strategic approach to digital.
- That the typographical error on page 2 of the report, concerning the organisational response and the completion date for ensuring the Head of Digital was a member of the Strategic Leadership Team be amended (it was currently showing as January 2023).

### Reason for recommendations

(1&2) Having regard to the contents of the report, as well as the discussions at the meeting.”

Attached as Appendix – Report to Corporate Performance and Resources Scrutiny Committee: 20<sup>th</sup> March, 2024

Meeting of:	<b>Corporate Performance and Resources Scrutiny Committee</b>
Date of Meeting:	<b>Wednesday, 20 March 2024</b>
Relevant Scrutiny Committee:	Corporate Performance and Resources
Report Title:	Digital Strategy Review - Vale of Glamorgan Council
Purpose of Report:	To advise Members of the findings of Audit Wales's review of the Council's Digital Strategy.
Report Owner:	Tom Bowring, Director of Corporate Resources
Responsible Officer:	Tom Bowring, Director of Corporate Resources
Elected Member and Officer Consultation:	No specific ward member consultation has been undertaken. Regulatory reports apply to the whole authority and inform Scrutiny Committees' annual work programme, the Cabinet annual work programme and the Council's improvement programme. Progress in relation to areas for improvement arising from the Annual Regulatory Plan (including local and national reviews) is regularly reported via the Council's Strategic Insight Board Insight Tracker to the Strategic Leadership Team, relevant Scrutiny Committees, Governance & Audit Committee and Cabinet for final oversight.
Policy Framework:	This is a matter for Executive decision by Cabinet.
<p>Executive Summary:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>As part of the Council's annual audit work programme for 2023, the Auditor General for Wales undertook a review of the Council's Digital Strategy.</li> <li>The purpose of the review was to help fulfil the Auditor General's duties under section 17 of the Public Audit (Wales) Act 2004 (the 2004 Act) and section 15 of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. This review has been being carried out across all Welsh authorities and with a focus on seeking assurance that councils' approach to digital will help to deliver well-being objectives in a way that secures value for money in the use of resources; provide assurance that councils are acting in accordance with the sustainable development principle in the design of their strategies; explain how councils are using/planning to use digital technology to meet people's needs and deliver better outcomes; and inspire and empower the councils and other public sector bodies by identifying and sharing examples of notable practice/approaches where relevant.</li> <li>The findings of the review (<b>Appendix A</b>) are as follows:</li> </ul>	

- 'The Council is taking the sustainable development principle into account in producing its digital strategy, and is developing arrangements to deliver the strategy, but monitoring arrangements are under-developed.
- The Council has made good use of internal evidence sources to inform its strategic approach to digital but has made limited use of external evidence sources.
- The Council has a clear vision for using digital technology and has considered how its approach to digital impacts on other things it is trying to achieve but has not articulated how it impacts on other public bodies.
- The Council has identified who it needs to involve in developing its next digital strategy and plans to consult widely, but it is not yet clear how the Council plans to collaborate with partners in delivering it.
- The Council has taken steps to ensure resources are in place to take forward the digital strategy, although there is further work to do in respect of what savings may be made through implementing its digital strategy.
- The Council does not monitor progress of its strategic approach to digital and there are weaknesses in the performance measures the Council intends to use in future.
- The Council has reviewed its previous digital strategy and is committed to reviewing its new strategy, but it's not clear at this stage how any lessons learned from the implementation of its new digital strategy will be shared.'
- 5 recommendations have been made to the strengthen Council's strategic approach to digital.
- In response to the recommendations, the Director of Corporate Resources and Head of Digital have developed an action plan which will be progressed by the Council.
- In line with the Council's performance monitoring arrangements, progress against our regulatory improvement areas will be monitored via the Strategic Insight Board Insight Tracker. All Scrutiny Committees will continue to be informed of progress against our regulatory improvement areas through quarterly performance monitoring arrangements. This will be supplemented with a 6 monthly and annual review of regulatory progress, which will be reported to the Governance & Audit Committee and Cabinet for final oversight. Progress will also be monitored by Audit Wales as part of the Council's annual audit work programme.
- Corporate Performance Resources Scrutiny Committee members are being asked to consider the contents of the appended reports including the Council's response (in the form of an action plan - **Appendix B**) with any recommendations /comments being referred to Governance & Audit Committee and thereafter, onto Cabinet for their consideration and endorsement of the proposed actions to address the recommendations.

## Recommendations

1. That the Corporate Performance & Resources Scrutiny Committee considers the findings arising from the review of the Council's Digital Strategy (**Appendix A**) and the response to the review findings and Audit Wales's recommendations (**Appendix B**).
2. That, subject to recommendation one, the report be referred to Governance & Audit committee and thereafter to Cabinet for their oversight and endorsement of the proposed Council actions (**Appendix B**) to address the recommendations.

## Reasons for Recommendations

1. To provide for scrutiny and review of the findings of Audit Wales's Springing Forward Assets review and the Council's response to its findings.
2. To ensure the Council responds appropriately and implements areas of improvement as identified by Audit Wales.

## 1. Background

- 1.1 As part of the Council's annual audit work programme for 2023, the Auditor General for Wales undertook a review of the Council's Digital Strategy with a particular focus on the extent to which the strategic approach to digital has been developed in accordance with the sustainable development principle and whether this will help to secure value for money in the use of the Council's resources.
- 1.2 The purpose of the review was to help fulfil the Auditor General's duties under section 17 of the Public Audit (Wales) Act 2004 (the 2004 Act) and section 15 of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. This review has been being carried out across all Welsh authorities and with a focus on seeking assurance that councils' approach to digital will help to deliver well-being objectives in a way that secures value for money in the use of resources; provide assurance that councils are acting in accordance with the sustainable development principle in the design of their strategies; explain how councils are using/planning to use digital technology to meet people's needs and deliver better outcomes; and inspire and empower the councils and other public sector bodies by identifying and sharing examples of notable practice/approaches where relevant.

## 2. Key Issues for Consideration

- 2.1 **Appendix A** contains the Audit Wales report outlining the key findings of the review. The review concluded that the Council:
  - 'is taking the sustainable development principle into account in producing its digital strategy, and is developing arrangements to deliver the strategy, but monitoring arrangements are under-developed.

- has made good use of internal evidence sources to inform its strategic approach to digital but has made limited use of external evidence sources.
  - has a clear vision for using digital technology and has considered how its approach to digital impacts on other things it is trying to achieve but has not articulated how it impacts on other public bodies.
  - has identified who it needs to involve in developing its next digital strategy and plans to consult widely, but it is not yet clear how the Council plans to collaborate with partners in delivering it.
  - has taken steps to ensure resources are in place to take forward the digital strategy, although there is further work to do in respect of what savings may be made through implementing its digital strategy.
  - The Council does not monitor progress of its strategic approach to digital and there are weaknesses in the performance measures the Council intends to use in future.
  - has reviewed its previous digital strategy and is committed to reviewing its new strategy, but it's not clear at this stage how any lessons learned from the implementation of its new digital strategy will be shared.'
- 2.2** The report makes five recommendations to the strengthen Council's strategic approach to digital:
- **R1:** To ensure that its digital strategy takes account of current and future trends and issues the Council should ensure its horizon scanning to inform its strategic approach to digital is well informed by external sources, including future trends. (Audit Wales provides some examples of what this might include).
  - **R2:** To avoid duplication and identify opportunities to deliver multiple benefits, the Council should review how its strategic approach to digital impacts on the objectives of other public bodies.
  - **R3:** The Council should ensure it has considered opportunities to collaborate in the delivery of its digital strategy to identify opportunities to share knowledge, expertise and/or resources that may improve value for money.
  - **R4:** To help the Council monitor the value for money of its digital strategy it should identify any savings it is aiming to make from the strategy and ensure that performance information used to monitor its digital strategy enables it to fully understand the impact of the Council's investment in digital.
  - **R5:** The Council should develop arrangements for identifying and sharing lessons learned from its approach to its digital strategy.
- 2.3** In response to the recommendations, the Director of Corporate Resources and Head of Digital have developed an action plan which will be progressed by the Council.
- 2.4** In line with the Council's performance monitoring arrangements, progress against our regulatory improvement areas will be monitored via the Strategic Insight Board Insight Tracker. All Scrutiny Committees will continue to be informed of progress against our regulatory improvement areas through

quarterly performance monitoring arrangements. This will be supplemented with a 6 monthly and annual review of regulatory progress, which will be reported to the Governance & Audit Committee and Cabinet for final oversight. Progress will also be monitored by Audit Wales as part of the Council's annual audit work programme.

- 2.5** Corporate Performance Resources Scrutiny Committee members are being asked to consider the contents of the appended reports including the Council's response (in the form of an action plan - **Appendix B**) with any recommendations /comments being referred to Governance & Audit Committee and thereafter, onto Cabinet for their consideration and endorsement of the proposed actions to address the recommendations

### **3. How do proposals evidence the Five Ways of Working and contribute to our Well-being Objectives?**

- 3.1** Performance Management is an intrinsic part of corporate governance and integrated business planning which underpins the delivery of the Council's Corporate Plan and its Well-being Outcomes. Our Corporate Plan has been structured around the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, through the development of four Well-being Objectives. By aligning our Well-being Objectives in the Corporate Plan with the Well-being Goals of the Act, this will enable us to better evidence our contribution to the Goals.
- 3.2** External Regulation is an important vehicle for driving continuous improvement across our services. Progressing the improvement areas identified by our regulators not only enables us to demonstrate our commitment to continuous service improvement, but also contributes to further strengthening our impact on the national well-being goals through the achievement of our well-being objectives.
- 3.3** The areas of improvement identified by our external regulators and the associated action plans produced by officers have been developed with the five ways of working in mind. The focus of these is on developing innovative ways of working that better integrate services, whilst enabling us to work more collaboratively with our partners and citizens to involve them in improving service delivery. These improvement actions also focus on preventative actions that will enable us to sustain and future proof our services into the longer term.

### **4. Climate Change and Nature Implications**

- 4.1** There are no implications directly arising from this report, although failure to progress the improvement areas outlined in the report could have a negative impact on any future external regulatory assessments and could result in a special inspection by the Auditor General for Wales if deemed that the Council is not meeting the performance requirements.
- 4.2** The Council's Digital Strategy aims to have a positive impact on climate change and nature overall.



## **5. Resources and Legal Considerations**

### **Financial**

- 5.1** There are no additional budgetary implications directly arising from this report, although failure to progress the improvement areas outlined in the report could have a negative impact on any future external regulatory assessments of the Council which could in turn put funding opportunities at risk.
- 5.2** The Digital Strategy will inform decisions around resource use that help to mitigate climate change and nature implications in the use of those resources.

### **Employment**

- 5.3** There are no direct workforce related implications associated with this report. However, there are a number of issues contained within the report that if not effectively managed have the potential to impact on our staff establishment and performance overall. This may in turn impact adversely on achievement of our well-being Objectives.
- 5.4** The resources required to support the delivery of our Digital Strategy priorities are subject to ongoing considerations as part of workforce planning.

### **Legal (Including Equalities)**

- 5.5** The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 (WBFG) and the Local Government & Elections (Wales) Act 2021 (LG&E) require the Council to publish annual Well-being Objectives, keep performance under review and consult and report on our performance through an annual self-assessment relating to the previous financial year.
- 5.6** The Auditor General for Wales is statutorily required under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, to examine public bodies to assess the extent to which they have acted in accordance with the sustainable development principle when setting their well-being objectives and taking steps to meet them.
- 5.7** Under the LG&E Act, a special inspection of the Council may be undertaken if the Auditor General for Wales considers that the council is not, or may not be meeting, the performance requirements. This inspection is to assess the extent to which the Council is meeting the performance requirements, in exercising its functions effectively; using its resources economically, efficiently and effectively; and in ensuring its governance is effective for securing the above.

## **6. Background Papers**

None

# Digital Strategy Review – Vale of Glamorgan Council

Audit year: 2022-2023

Date issued: November 2023

Document reference: 3946A2023

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Mae'r ddogfen hon hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg. This document is also available in Welsh.

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# Report summary

## Report summary

### Exhibit 1: report summary

The exhibit below summarises the reason we undertook this audit, our key findings and recommendations for the Council.

#### Why a strategic approach to digital is important

- 1 Digital technology is key to delivering a wide range of council services in a more economic, efficient and effective way, is also an important means of councils delivering their wellbeing objectives and carrying out sustainable development.
- 2 Having a clearly articulated strategic approach to digital can bring several benefits such as:
  - establishing a common vision for use of digital and the intended outcomes for local communities linked to the council's strategic objectives;
  - helping to ensure that councils' use of digital technology is aligned with their key strategic objectives and other plans and strategies and is informed by a good understanding of current and future trends;
  - reducing the risk of duplication both within councils and with partners;
  - consideration of resourcing digital over the short, medium and longer term together; and
  - providing a framework against which to monitoring progress over the short, long and medium term.

#### The focus of our audit

- 3 We looked at the extent to which the Council's strategic approach to digital has been developed in accordance with the sustainable development principle and that it will help to secure value for money in the use of the Council's resources.

#### Our key findings

- 4 We found that the Council has a clear vision for using digital technology. The Council has made good use of internal evidence sources to inform its strategic approach to digital but has made limited use of external evidence sources. The Council has identified who it needs to involve in developing its digital strategy and plans to consult widely, but it is not yet clear how the Council plans to collaborate with partners in delivering it. The strategic approach is aligned with its other key plans and strategies, but the Council has not articulated how it impacts on other public bodies. The Council has taken steps to ensure resources are in place to take forward its new digital strategy but has further work to do to determine any savings that may be made. The Council does not monitor progress of its strategic approach to digital and there are weaknesses

in the performance measures the Council intends to use. The Council has reviewed its previous digital strategy, but it is not clear at this stage how any lessons learned from the implementation of its new digital strategy will be shared.

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### **Our recommendations for the Council**

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- R1 To ensure that its digital strategy takes account of current and future trends and issues the Council should ensure its horizon scanning to inform its strategic approach to digital is well informed by external sources, including future trends (see our audit criteria for Q.1.1 and Q1.2 in appendix A for some examples of what this might include).
- 
- R2 To avoid duplication and identify opportunities to deliver multiple benefits, the Council should review how its strategic approach to digital impacts on the objectives of other public bodies.
- 
- R3 The Council should ensure it has considered opportunities to collaborate in the delivery of its digital strategy to identify opportunities to share knowledge, expertise and/or resources that may improve value for money.
- 
- R4 To help the Council monitor the value for money of its digital strategy it should:
- identify any savings it is aiming to make from the strategy.
  - ensure that performance information used to monitor its digital strategy enables it to fully understand the impact of the Council's investment in digital
- 
- R5 The Council should develop arrangements for identifying and sharing lessons learned from its approach to its digital strategy.

# Detailed report

## What we looked at and why – the scope of this audit

- 1 We reviewed the Council's strategic approach to digital, and specifically the extent to which this has been developed in accordance with the sustainable development principle; and that it will help to secure value for money in the use of the Council's resources.
- 2 Our findings are based on document reviews and interviews with a sample of Cabinet Members and senior officers. The evidence we have used to inform our findings is limited to these sources.
- 3 We set out to answer the question '**In developing its digital strategy has the Council acted in accordance with the sustainable development principle and put in place proper arrangements to secure value for money in the use of its resources?**' We did this by exploring the following questions:
  - Is the Council's digital strategy informed by a good understanding of current and future trends?
  - Does the Council have a clear vision of what it wants to achieve through the use of digital technology?
  - Is the Council working effectively with the right people and partners to design and deliver its digital strategy?
  - Has the Council resourced delivery of its digital strategy so it can deliver long-term/preventative benefits?
  - Is the Council monitoring and reviewing progress?
  - Is the Council learning lessons from how it works?
- 4 **Appendix 1** sets out the detailed questions we set out to answer along with the audit criteria we used to arrive at our findings.

## Why we undertook this audit

- 5 This audit was undertaken to help fulfil the Auditor General's duties under section 17 of the Public Audit (Wales) Act 2004 (the 2004 Act) and section 15 of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.
- 6 We sought to:
  - provide assurance that councils' digital strategies will help to deliver well-being objectives in a way that secures value for money in the use of resources;
  - provide assurance that councils are acting in accordance with the sustainable development principle in the design of their digital strategies;
  - explain how councils are using/planning to use digital technology to meet people's needs and deliver better outcomes; and

- inspire and empower councils and other public sector bodies by identifying and sharing examples of notable practice/approaches where relevant.

## The Council's digital strategy

- 7 The Council had a Digital Strategy for the period 2017-2020. In July 2023, a new draft Digital Strategy covering the period 2023-2028 went to Cabinet. The draft Digital Strategy has four themes:
- Community and involvement
  - Organisation and processes
  - Digital people and skills
  - Data and insight
- 8 The Council is currently in the process of recruiting a head of digital. The Council also has a £1.5m reserve in place to support the implementation of new digital ways of working and to update current systems.

**What we found: The Council is taking the sustainable development principle into account in producing its digital strategy, and is developing arrangements to deliver the strategy, but monitoring arrangements are under-developed**

**The Council has made good use of internal evidence sources to inform its strategic approach to digital but has made limited use of external evidence sources**

- 9 The Council has got a good understanding of its current situation from internal evidence sources to inform its strategic approach to digital. In 2021 it commissioned a company to carry out a digital maturity assessment to help it to understand its current position in respect of digital. The Council built on that work by commissioning SOCITM<sup>1</sup> to help produce its draft digital strategy. As part of the development of its draft digital strategy, the Council held staff workshops across all Directorates to help it to understand the ways that the Council is currently using digital technology. This understanding of its current situation provided the Council with a sound basis on which to develop its digital strategy from.
- 10 However, the Council made limited use of external evidence sources to understand both current and future trends in developing its draft digital strategy. The Council

<sup>1</sup> Society for Innovation Technology and Modernisation



recognises in its draft digital strategy that it needs to develop its horizon scanning. The Council intends to develop its horizon scanning to identify potential digital solutions and to identify potential technologies that may support the transformation of services. Our audit criteria for this project gives examples of these such as social, economic/political, environmental, cultural or technological. Considering a wider range of information and data should enable the Council to better understand current and challenges, opportunities and risks for digital within the County to inform its strategic approach.

**The Council has a clear vision for using digital technology and has considered how its approach to digital impacts on other things it is trying to achieve, but has not articulated how it impacts on other public bodies**

- 11 The Council has a clearly articulated vision for digital and there appears to be a good understanding within the Council of what it is trying to achieve through its use of digital technology. This should be further enhanced with the planned staff consultation on the draft digital strategy.
- 12 There is strong evidence that the Council has considered the wider impacts of across the Council. The Council has considered how its strategic approach to digital will align to other plans and strategies it has including for example its Public Participation Strategy, Project Zero Climate Change Challenge Plan and People Strategy.
- 13 The Council has considered how its strategic approach to digital could contribute to the national well-being goals. The 2023-24 service plans show how services are contributing to the Annual Delivery Plan action relating to digital and each action also sets out its contribution to the national well-being goals. There are implicit linkages such as the digital inclusion aspirations aligning with the goal of 'a more equal Wales'. Aligning the digital strategy with the National Well-being Goals and the Council's other plans and strategies helps to reduce the risk of duplication and helps to identify opportunities to deliver multiple benefits.
- 14 The Council has not fully considered how delivery of the digital strategy will impact on what other public bodies are trying to achieve. Aligning its approach with other public bodies will help to identify opportunities to share resources, avoid duplication of efforts and deliver multiple benefits.
- 15 The Council is planning over an appropriate timescale. It has considered what long-term means for its digital approach. It has adopted a five-year timeframe for its digital strategy, to reflect that digital technology is constantly changing at an ever-increasing pace. It has set out actions that it will take within the first year of the strategy, within years two to three of the strategy and within the five year term of the strategy. There are examples within the draft strategy of longer-term thinking where current projects lay the foundation for future development. An example of this is the intention to explore the potential use of artificial intelligence. These factors indicate that the Council's strategic approach to digital includes planning for

the longer-term which should help to reduce the reliance on short-term interventions that may provide less value for money over the longer term.

**The Council has identified who it needs to involve in developing its next digital strategy and plans to consult widely, but it is not yet clear how the Council plans to collaborate with partners in delivering it**

- 16 The Council has involved others in developing its new digital strategy. It has done this in the following ways:
- The Council engaged SOCITM as part of the process in developing its draft digital strategy
  - The Council engaged over 100 staff from across all service areas as part of developing its draft digital strategy
  - Elected members have been involved as the draft digital strategy has gone to Cabinet and scrutiny.
  - The Council will be undertaking a consultation with residents on the draft digital strategy in the form of an online survey (with an option to provide feedback by telephone).
  - Schools will be involved in the consultation process on the draft digital strategy; and
  - The Council will share the draft digital strategy with PSB partners for comment.
- The Council's method for involving the diversity of the population is to include the Equalities Consultative Forum, staff diversity networks and members champion networks as part of the consultation on the draft digital strategy. The Council is also focused on not leaving behind the digitally excluded. As a result of its involvement activity, the Council must be prepared to potentially make changes to its strategic approach. Involving the diversity of its citizens in developing its strategic digital approach helps the Council to have assurance it is designing an approach that meets citizens' needs and is more likely to secure value for money.
- 17 The Council recognises the importance of collaborating effectively with the right partners on digital. The Council's annual self-assessment states that a key focus going forward is to 'work more collaboratively to identify and implement innovative solutions to deliver sustained digital transformation...' There are various references in the draft digital strategy to pursuing partnership working, but little on what this will mean in practice. There is an opportunity for the Council to explore further avenues of collaboration, such as joint commissioning, procurement or other sharing or pooling of resources. Collaborative procurement can enable partners to pool their resources and leverage their collective buying power to achieve better deals from suppliers while reducing costs and improving value for money. Working in partnership can result in a sharing of knowledge, expertise and/or resources that can lead to better outcomes whilst also improving value for money.

## **The Council has taken steps to ensure resources are in place to take forward the digital strategy, although there is further work to do in respect of what savings may be made through implementing its digital strategy**

- 18 The Council has allocated funding to help it take forward its strategic approach to digital. There is a £1.524m digital reshaping reserve and money has been set aside to recruit to a new Head of Digital post. This demonstrates the Council's commitment to improving its strategic approach to digital.
- 19 The Council has not yet identified all of the savings it intends to make through its strategic approach to digital. A £27k savings target has been identified for 2023-24, but the Council hasn't yet identified any savings for future years. The Council recognises the importance of this and has included a Key Performance Indicator (KPI) in its draft digital strategy of 'Monitoring the cost savings achieved through the implementation of digital processes'. It is important for the Council to do this to help it to monitor and evaluate the costs and benefits of implementing its digital strategy from a value for money perspective.
- 20 There are examples of the Council allocating resources to deliver better outcomes over the long-term. The Council's annual self-assessment refers to investment in upskilling its staff digitally. The draft digital strategy includes plans for further developing this. The Council is taking action on its digital inclusion agenda, with examples given in the annual self-assessment. For example, a £19k grant funding to support digital inclusion initiatives for veterans. Although the Council recognises that it has more work to do to take forward its plans for renewing its IT infrastructure. Considering how resources can be best deployed to deliver benefits over the longer-term is an important element of arrangements to secure value for money.

## **The Council does not monitor progress of its strategic approach to digital and there are weaknesses in the performance measures the Council intends to use in future**

- 21 The Council is not currently monitoring and reviewing progress of its strategic approach to digital. Once the draft digital strategy goes live, the Council intends to set up a Digital Programme Board. In the interim, the Strategic Insight Board is overseeing the development of the draft digital strategy. Monitoring the achievement of objectives for both the Council's strategic approach and individual digital projects is important to understand the impact of the Council's investment in digital, and therefore of arrangements to secure value for money.
- 22 The Council does not currently have measures that help it to monitor its strategic approach to digital. However, the draft digital strategy sets out some KPIs that the Council has developed to help it to measure the success of the digital strategy. The

KPIs mainly focus on outputs (e.g. take up of digital channels) as opposed to outcomes. The KPIs do not always align with the success measures or the strategic objectives. Some of the success measures in the draft digital strategy lack baseline data - for example, there are references to lowering staff attrition rates but without clarifying what the current position is. Without measures that enable the Council to fully understand the impact of its investment in digital or the wider contribution that the digital strategy is making across its own, and partners', objectives it will be difficult for the Council to assess and monitor the value for money of its strategic approach.

**The Council has reviewed its previous digital strategy and is committed to reviewing its new strategy, but it's not clear at this stage how any lessons learned from the implementation of its new digital strategy will be shared**

- 23 The Council has reviewed its previous strategic approach to digital. In 2021, the Council commissioned a digital maturity assessment. This included an analysis of the previous digital strategy and various SWOT<sup>2</sup> analyses. The Council then built on that work by commissioning SOCITM to help develop its new draft digital strategy. The Council is also committed to reviewing its forthcoming digital strategy. The draft strategy states that it will be reviewed after the first year of operating and as required following that. However, it's not clear how the Council intends to share lessons learned. Reviewing the effectiveness of its strategic approach and learning and sharing lessons from this (both internally and externally), can help the Council to improve the effectiveness and value for money of its approach in future.

<sup>2</sup> Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats

# Appendix 1

## Audit questions and audit criteria

Below are the questions we sought to answer in carrying out this audit, along with the audit criteria we used to arrive at our findings.

Main audit question: **In developing its digital strategy has the Council acted in accordance with the sustainable development principle and put in place proper arrangements to secure value for money in the use of its resources?**

### Exhibit 2: audit questions and audit criteria

Level 2 questions	Level 3 questions	Criteria
1. Is the Council's digital strategy informed by a good understanding of current and future trends?	1.1 Is there is a thorough understanding of the 'as is' (ie current demand/issues to be addressed) and the reasons why/underlying causes?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Council has drawn on a broad range of information from internal and external sources to develop a thorough understanding of the 'as is' and how it is likely to change. This includes information (including data) relating to:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– service sustainability/resilience and resourcing challenges.</li> <li>– the needs of citizens and communities.</li> <li>– the underlying causes of current demand/issues to be addressed.</li> <li>– analysis of future trends and how they might impact, eg social, economic/political, environmental, cultural or technological. They might include known trends eg ageing population, depleting natural resources and particularly technological advances. They might also include those with a higher level of uncertainty eg jobs and skills needed in the future.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• The analysis of the 'as is' and how it is likely to change is well informed by involvement activity, as appropriate, that reflects recognised good practice (eg <a href="#">National Principles for Public Engagement in Wales</a>, Future Generations Commissioner for Wales advice and guidance).</li> <li>• The Council uses its evidence base effectively to:</li> </ul>
	1.2 Is there a thorough understanding of the long-term factors that will impact and the challenges and opportunities that may result (eg risks and opportunities)?	

Level 2 questions	Level 3 questions	Criteria
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– identify actions in its strategic approach to digital that are likely to be most effective and why, including how they could address the root causes of problems;</li> <li>– inform decisions around its use of digital technology that seek to balance the need to meet short and longer-term objectives.</li> </ul>
<p>2. Does the Council have a clear vision of what it wants to achieve through the use of digital technology?</p>	<p>2.1 Is the Council planning over an appropriate timescale?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Council has considered what long term means in planning its approach to digital – ie how far ahead it can/should plan and why (at least ten years with consideration of longer-term trends as appropriate).</li> <li>• The Council has considered how actions can deliver the best impact over that timeframe in terms of outcomes and most effective use of resources. This could include consideration of appropriate intervention points linked to the Commissioner’s definition of prevention. (More details can be found in: <a href="#">Taking account of the Well-being of Future Generations Act in the budget process – The Future Generations Commissioner for Wales</a>).</li> <li>• The Council has set out measures for its digital strategy that reflect short and long-term impacts and value for money, with milestones that reflect progress as appropriate.</li> <li>• The Council has set out how its digital strategy will be resourced over the longer term as far as is practical (see also criteria relating to integration).</li> </ul>
	<p>2.2 Has the Council thought about the wider impacts its digital strategy could have, including:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Council has considered how its digital strategy can make a contribution across the well-being goals.</li> <li>• Staff developing the digital strategy understand what colleagues and partners do and how their work relates, and have sought to integrate their</li> </ul>

Level 2 questions	Level 3 questions	Criteria
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• how it could contribute to each of the seven national well-being goals?</li> <li>• how delivery will impact on the other things it is trying to achieve (ie its well-being objectives and wider priorities)?</li> <li>• how delivery will impact on other what other public bodies are trying to achieve (ie their well-being objectives)?</li> </ul>	<p>work with that of their colleagues from across the Council and with partner organisations.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Integration is evident in the alignment of the digital strategy with other key corporate strategies and service plans. For example medium-term financial plan, workforce plan, asset management strategies, well-being statement and carbon reduction plans.</li> <li>• The digital strategy is aligned with other strategic intents such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– customer experience;</li> <li>– management of demand/reductions in demand failure and prevention; and</li> <li>– design and implementation of new service delivery models.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• The Council's digital strategy aligns with the plans/strategies of local and national partners including the Welsh Government's Digital Strategy for Wales Digital strategy and well-being plans.</li> </ul>
	<p>2.3 Is there a wide and common understanding of what the Council is trying to achieve?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Councillors and senior officers responsible for implementing the digital strategy have a common and clear understanding of what the Council is trying to achieve and the intended impact on service delivery.</li> <li>• The Council's digital strategy is clearly communicated to staff and partners who may help deliver it.</li> </ul>

Level 2 questions	Level 3 questions	Criteria
<p>3. Is the Council working effectively with the right people and partners to design and deliver its digital strategy</p>	<p>3.1 Has the Council identified who it needs to involve?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Council has a good understanding of who will be directly and indirectly affected by its digital strategy and who it needs to involve.</li> <li>• The Council has effectively involved the full diversity of views in developing its digital strategy, including from non-traditional sources and from those it may have previously failed to reach.</li> </ul>
	<p>3.2 Is the Council effectively involving the full diversity of people affected by its digital strategy?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Council has provided genuine opportunities for people to influence the design and delivery of its digital strategy from an early stage, including representatives of groups who share protected characteristics.</li> <li>• The Council has used the results of involvement to shape the design and delivery of its digital strategy.</li> </ul>
	<p>3.3 Is the Council collaborating effectively with the right partners?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Council is collaborating to ensure it delivers better outcomes and value for money through its digital strategy and has put appropriate arrangements in place to support this, for example for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– sharing or pooling expertise and resources;</li> <li>– sharing information;</li> <li>– ensuring effective monitoring, evaluation and accountability including consideration of value for money.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>



Level 2 questions	Level 3 questions	Criteria
<p>4. Has the Council resourced delivery of its digital strategy so it can deliver long-term/preventative benefits?</p>	<p>4.1 Does the Council understand long-term resource implications?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Council has assessed the costs and benefits of using digital technology to invest in long-term, preventative approaches and the cost (both financial and in terms of outcomes) of not doing so.</li> <li>• The Council has thought about the resources it will need to deliver its digital strategy over the medium and longer term (whole life costs) and how it could manage risks/meet those costs including, for example, planned 'invest to save' initiatives and managed reductions in technical debt.</li> <li>• The Council has calculated and set out any savings it intends to make through implementing its digital strategy.</li> </ul>
	<p>4.2 Does the Council allocate resources to deliver better outcomes over the long-term?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Action (including preventative action) that is likely to contribute to better outcomes and/or use of resources over the longer term is promoted and supported, even: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– where this may limit the ability to meet some short-term needs;</li> <li>– where the benefits are likely to be accrued by or attributed to another organisation.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

Level 2 questions	Level 3 questions	Criteria
5. Is the Council monitoring and reviewing progress?	5.1 Is the Council monitoring and reviewing progress towards, short, medium and longer-term objectives?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Council monitors the costs and benefits of delivering its digital strategy from a value for money perspective.</li> <li>• The Council is measuring the wider contribution the digital strategy is making across its own/partnership objectives.</li> <li>• Progress is measured against short, medium and long-term objectives.</li> </ul>
6. Is the Council learning lessons from how it works?	6.1 Does the Council review the effectiveness of its digital strategy?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Council regularly reviews the effectiveness of its digital strategy including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– effectiveness of its collaborative activity;</li> <li>– effectiveness of its involvement activity, including the impact of the strategy on service users including those who are digitally excluded;</li> <li>– the impact of the strategy on those who share protected characteristics;</li> <li>– the economy, efficiency and effectiveness of the digital strategy overall in helping the Council to achieve its strategic objectives.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• The Council has reviewed lessons learned from its response to the pandemic and is applying this learning to its digital strategy.</li> </ul>
	6.2 Does the Council share lessons learned from its approach to its digital strategy?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Council shares and applies any lessons learned from the development and delivery of its digital strategy widely across the organisation, and with partners where relevant.</li> </ul>



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Rydym yn croesawu gohebiaeth a galwadau ffôn yn Gymraeg a Saesneg.

## Organisational response

**Report title:** Digital Strategy review – Vale of Glamorgan Council

**Completion date:**

**Document reference:** 3946A2023

Ref	Recommendation	Organisational response Please set out here relevant commentary on the planned actions in response to the recommendations	Completion date Please set out by when the planned actions will be complete	Responsible officer (title)
R1	To ensure that its digital strategy takes account of current and future trends and issues the Council should ensure its horizon scanning to inform its strategic approach to digital is well informed by external sources, including future trends (see our audit criteria for Q.1.1 and Q1.2 in appendix A for some examples of what this might include).	<p><b>As we further develop our Digital Strategy and implement it over future years, we will seek to ensure that we embed learnings from our wider Strategic Plans to understand the social, economic and cultural trends that impact our residents and businesses. We will utilise findings from the Future Generations Commissioner as well as outputs from governing bodies such as the Centre Welsh Digital Public standards to ensure that we consider changes in our scope of work.</b></p> <p><b>Appoint a Head of Digital to ensure the Digital Strategy is led by a Senior Officer with relevant experience.</b></p> <p><b>Ensure the Head of Digital is a member of the Strategic Leadership Team so as to understand and contribute in our strategic considerations and decision making.</b></p>	<p><b>March 2028 (on-going throughout delivery of Digital Strategy)</b></p> <p><b>December 2023 (Completed)</b></p> <p><b>January 2023 (On-going)</b></p>	<p><b>Head of Digital</b></p> <p><b>Director of Corporate Resources</b></p> <p><b>Director of Corporate Resources</b></p>
R2	To avoid duplication and identify opportunities to deliver multiple benefits, the Council should review how its strategic approach to digital impacts on the objectives of other public bodies.	<p><b>The Vale of Glamorgan Council understands that only through collaboration with wider organisations can we deliver digital changes that genuinely reflect the needs of our residents and businesses.</b></p> <p><b>The successful implementation of our Digital Strategy will call for us to engage across</b></p>	<p><b>March 2028 (on-going throughout delivery of Digital Strategy)</b></p>	<p><b>Head of Digital</b></p>

		<p>organisations. To seek best practise from and to build upon patterns created by other LAs across Wales and England as well as to contribute to wider projects to identify, build and analyse cross authority projects.</p> <p>We recognise and embrace the need to engage with partners across social, health and education as our primary drivers and through engagement with regional and national boards understand and respond to challenges using collaboration, shared resources and expertise. The Digital Strategy aims to enhance the way in which we collaborate with partners, recognising that by working together in this way we will maximise impact and avoid duplication.</p> <p>During the implementation of the Digital Strategy, the work will be formally reported annually to Cabinet, including a review of the impact on the objectives of other organisations, reflecting integration and collaboration.</p>	Annually, March 2025	Head of Digital
R3	The Council should ensure it has considered opportunities to collaborate in the delivery of its digital strategy to identify opportunities to share knowledge, expertise and/or resources that may improve value for money.	<p>See also response to R2 above.</p> <p>The Digital Strategy references collaboration and will be regularly monitored via the Strategic Insight Board and SLT in addition to 'formal' reporting to Cabinet. This is intended to ensure opportunities to collaborate are identified and taken advantage of.</p>	Ongoing, March 2025	Head of Digital

R4	<p>To help the Council monitor the value for money of its digital strategy it should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– identify any savings it is aiming to make from the strategy.</li> <li>– ensure that performance information used to monitor its digital strategy enables it to fully understand the impact of the Council's investment in digital.</li> </ul>	<p><b>The Council's Medium-Term Financial Strategy and Budget Proposals indicate the specific savings targeted from digital projects. This is a theme in the Reshaping Programme and proposals will continue to be identified and savings allocated to these projects.</b></p>	<p><b>March 2024 (and annually)</b></p>	<p><b>Head of Digital/SLT</b></p>
		<p><b>As we develop the implementation of the Digital Strategy, our core goal is to empower our teams across the council to identify and deliver digitalisation.</b></p> <p><b>Within each business case for digital centric change, we will identify potential savings and collate these to report on an annual basis our cumulative savings. Drawdowns from the Digital Reserve require a business case proforma to be completed setting out these details.</b></p>	<p><b>On-going</b></p>	<p><b>Head of Digital</b></p>
		<p><b>The design and delivery of many of the digital capabilities are a core building block on which the council will create the organisational change that allows us to be fit for the future. We are therefore considering mechanics to measure these in a way that identifies the contribution that has been made as well as ensuring that we acknowledge that as fundamental tools, their impact is not under represented.</b></p>		
		<p><b>We will look to further understand the definition of services and their measurement so that we have the capability to understand the impact of digitalisation on our resources.</b></p>	<p><b>March 2024 (and annually)</b></p>	<p><b>Head of Digital</b></p>

		<p>In the meantime, we will work to further refine measurements as we increase our Data capability and utilise data monitored via the Council's Performance Management Framework. The Framework is updated annually to provide regular performance information against Key Performance Indicators and agreed actions set out within our Annual Delivery Plan and Service Plans, helping to embed the capture of digitalisation activity across the organisation.</p>		
R5	<p>The Council should develop arrangements for identifying and sharing lessons learned from its approach to its digital strategy.</p>	<p>The nature of digitalisation requires us to review our Digital Strategy on a regular basis to ensure that our approach remains aligned to changing social, economic and technological trends. We will review the Digital Strategy after year one, identify any further amendments and insight that would have improved its delivery and embed into subsequent iterations. Our recent work on the Data Strategy has been informed through lessons learned in the design of the Digital Strategy and has identified the requirement for enhanced workshops as well as increased horizon scanning.</p>	<p>July 2024</p>	<p>Head of Digital</p>