

AGENDA ITEM

REPORT TO CABINET

24 JANUARY 2019

**REPORT OF PEOPLE
SELECT COMMITTEE**

CABINET DECISION

Lead Cabinet Member – Access, Communities & Community Safety – Cllr Steve Nelson

SCRUTINY REVIEW OF DIGITAL OPTIMISATION

1. Summary

The attached report presents the outcomes of the People Select Committee's review of Digital Optimisation.

2. Recommendations

The Committee recommend that:

- 1) A review of *My Stockton* with regards content and layout be undertaken.
- 2) Work be undertaken to understand why too few of the Borough's residents are using the Council's digital services (in line with the Local Government Digital Service Standard).
- 3) Digital service options on the Council's home page be made more visible / explicit (e.g. 'sign up for *My Stockton*').
- 4) Information on where to get WiFi or access to a computer within the Borough be provided on the Council's website (as per Wigan Council's website).
- 5) SBC should ensure that senior management are able to recognise the potential benefits for digital services across all departments and ensure this is reflected in the culture of the Council.
- 6) Consideration be given to expanding the role of the Council's Digital Services Group to develop SBC Digital Champions within each directorate and to engage with the community.
- 7) SBC embraces the iDEA (The Duke of York Inspiring Digital Enterprise Award) concept, both within the Council itself, and for residents young and old.
- 8) Appropriate skills be developed and resources prioritised within the Council's workforce to design, progress and implement digital services.

- 9) A digital skills development section is included within Council staff appraisals (individual and team requirements).
- 10) Consideration be given as to how, in addition to those areas with the highest number of customer transactions, further digital solutions can be identified and implemented in those Council services with the greatest spend (Adults and Children's Services).
- 11) Collaboration between service areas, ICT and communications and web teams continues to ensure a joined-up approach, as well as fostering wider learning through regular liaison and joint working with other Local Authorities, both regionally and nationally.
- 12) The Council's Digital Services Group provides leadership and opportunities for collaboration for the Council to deliver greater value through digital service delivery.
- 13) Bids for funding of digital projects continue to be submitted, where appropriate, to build on the Council's current digital offer.

3. Reasons for the Recommendation(s)/Decision(s)

The report presents the findings of the scrutiny review of Digital Optimisation which was originally part of the 2017-2018 scrutiny work programme, but did not begin until the 2018-2019 municipal year.

4. Members' Interests

Members (including co-opted Members) should consider whether they have a personal interest in any item, as defined in **paragraphs 9 and 11** of the Council's code of conduct and, if so, declare the existence and nature of that interest in accordance with and/or taking account of **paragraphs 12 - 17** of the code.

Where a Member regards him/herself as having a personal interest, as described in **paragraph 16** of the code, in any business of the Council he/she must then, **in accordance with paragraph 18** of the code, consider whether that interest is one which a member of the public, with knowledge of the relevant facts, would reasonably regard as so significant that it is likely to prejudice the Member's judgement of the public interest and the business:-

- affects the members financial position or the financial position of a person or body described in **paragraph 17** of the code, or
- relates to the determining of any approval, consent, licence, permission or registration in relation to the member or any person or body described in **paragraph 17** of the code.

A Member with a personal interest, as described in **paragraph 18** of the code, may attend the meeting but must not take part in the consideration and voting upon the relevant item of business. However, a member with such an interest may make representations, answer questions or give evidence relating to that business before the business is considered or voted on, provided the public are also allowed to attend the meeting for the same purpose whether under a statutory right or otherwise (**paragraph 19** of the code).

Members may participate in any discussion and vote on a matter in which they have an interest, as described in **paragraph 18** of the code, where that interest relates to functions of the Council detailed in **paragraph 20** of the code.

Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

It is a criminal offence for a member to participate in any discussion or vote on a matter in which he/she has a disclosable pecuniary interest (and where an appropriate dispensation has not been granted) **paragraph 21** of the code.

Members are required to comply with any procedural rule adopted by the Council which requires a member to leave the meeting room whilst the meeting is discussing a matter in which that member has a disclosable pecuniary interest (**paragraph 22** of the code).

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RECOMMENDATIONS

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DETAIL

1. In November 2012, the *Government Digital Strategy* was published which set out how the government would become 'digital by default' – that is, digital services that are so straightforward and convenient that all those who can use them will choose to do so whilst those who cannot are not excluded. It was estimated that moving services from offline to digital channels would save between £1.7 and £1.8 billion a year.
2. The strategy acknowledged that most public services are provided by local organisations such as local Council's and the NHS, and that people often use a range of services, not just one at a time. It was also noted that most people and businesses do not differentiate between different levels and types of public services; they just want a good service.
3. From a Council perspective, LocalGov Digital, with the support of the Government Digital Service (GDS), created the Local Government Digital Service Standard (LGDSS) which set out key recommendations to create and deliver excellent quality, user-centred, value for money digital services. Peer networks support Councils in adopting the Standard and publish guidance on how best to implement each of the 15 points it contains – though there is no such network in the North East of England, Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council participate in the Yorkshire and Humberside peer group events.
4. A 2012 SOCITM (society for IT/digital leaders) study across 120 local Councils estimated that the cost of contact for face-to-face transactions averages £8.62, for phone £2.83, but for web only 15 pence. The *Digital Efficiency Report* found that the average cost of a central government digital transaction can be almost 20 times lower than the cost of telephone and 50 times lower than face-to-face. Councils have huge numbers of customer interactions every year, and by channelling visitors away from expensive phone and face-to-face interactions and towards more lean and efficient user-friendly digital services, they can serve more customers whilst significantly reducing costs.
5. Increasing digital provision allows for better customer service and experience, and offers 24 hour-7 days a week access. This can in turn enhance the customer journey by providing greater interaction between the Council and its residents (e.g. Council responses to service feedback can be provided in a more timely manner, avoiding the need for the customer to contact services for an update, which could diminish the customer experience).
6. Of course, digital exclusion is a legitimate concern, and traditional channels still need to be provided to ensure that customers who are not online are not excluded from services. However, in the face of ongoing cuts to finances and increasing levels of demand, sound implementation and utilisation of technology and digital tools and approaches gives

Councils the ability to deal with these challenges more effectively. By providing those residents capable of self-serving with the means to do so, Councils can focus precious resources upon those in society most in need. And supporting the community to develop self-help approaches can prevent some demand from arising in the first place (LGA: *Transforming local public services – using technology and digital tools and approaches*, 2014).

7. The aim of this review was therefore to:

- assess how well Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council is progressing in its provision of digital services;
- understand how digital services are being tailored to meet the needs of the Borough's residents (personalisation of service);
- consider to what extent the Council facilitates those who need access to digital services, mitigating digital exclusion through the provision of technology in libraries and assisted customer self-serve;
- ascertain how the Council's digital services are being communicated, and how residents are being engaged;
- explore what can be developed in the future to further encourage the channel shift towards digital services.

8. The Committee received evidence from a number of internal departments including Customer Services, Communications Team, Web Team, Revenues and Benefits Service, Care For Your Area and Environmental Health. External organisations who provided key evidence included Xentrall Shared Services, Milton Keynes Council (LGC Digital Council of the Year 2018), Newcastle City Council and Wigan Council (LGC Digital Council of the Year 2016 & Digital Leaders: Digital Council of the Year 2016).

COMMUNITY IMPACT IMPLICATIONS

9. A key feature of this review was to explore what measures could be put in place to further encourage the channel shift from traditional means (telephone and face-to-face) to modern digital options, with online services so straightforward and convenient that those who can use them choose to do so – the essence of 'digital by default'. However, the review also acknowledges that digital is not the only way, and that other means of communication with the Council need to be preserved for those unable or unwilling to utilise online options.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

10. Future investment in digital service provision (including ICT infrastructure and staffing resources) will need to be assessed on an individual business case basis, reflecting clear outcomes and impacts on costs to the Council. The Council adopts an 'invest-to-save' approach to digitalisation, and the financial benefits in encouraging the channel shift to online services are well established.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

11. In terms of legal implications, digital service provision, particularly the way in which data is requested, gathered and stored, will need to be mindful of GDPR requirements.

RISK ASSESSMENT

12. This review is categorised as low to medium risk. Existing management systems and daily routine activities are sufficient to control and reduce risk.

COUNCIL PLAN POLICY PRINCIPLES AND PRIORITIES

13. The review will contribute to the following Council Plan 2018-21 themes and objectives:

Our Council

- Continue to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of our services
 - Providing digital access to our services
 - Using existing and new technologies to help us work differently
 - Ensuring that our policies, processes and procedures are as efficient and productive as they can be
 - Ensuring our infrastructure is fit for purpose for a modern organisation
- Deliver effective communication
 - Continue to implement the programme to improve the Council's website including further development of digital and social media arrangements

CORPORATE PARENTING IMPLICATIONS

14. There are no direct implications in the report.

CONSULTATION INCLUDING WARD/COUNCILLORS

15. The Committee have received evidence as set out in the final report of the People Select Committee.

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Education related?: No

Background Papers: None

Ward(s) and Ward Councillors: Recommendations included in this review are not Ward-specific.

Property: Customer Service Centres across the Borough.