

Interim Technology Strategy for Somerset Council

Executive Member(s): Cllr Mike Rigby - Lead Member for Transport and Digital

Local Member(s) and Division: All

LGR Workstream: Asset Optimisation Technical (Nicola Hix and Oliver Woodhams)

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1. Summary/Background

- 1.1. The Interim Technology Strategy explains how Somerset Council plans to use technology, particularly Information Technology, to support the delivery of the Somerset Council Corporate Objectives. It closely linked to, and supports delivery of, both the Digital Strategy and the Data Strategy.
- 1.2. The paper is termed an *interim* strategy because there are important topics that, at this stage cannot be fully addressed. The developing Corporate Plan, Target Operating Model, Corporate Governance protocols, final organisational structure, and more detailed cost modelling will all affect how the strategy develops. This Interim Strategy is intended to give firm foundations upon which to build.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1. LGR Joint Scrutiny Bord is asked to:
 - 2.1.1 **note** the key elements of the Interim Technology Strategy,
 - 2.1.2 **note** the high-level implications and risks,
 - 2.1.3 **endorse** the interim strategy.

3. Reasons for recommendations

- 3.1. Many new and emerging technologies have the potential to significantly improve the services we deliver to our customers and communities, and the efficiency of the council as an organisation. The One Somerset Business Case includes maximising the exploitation of digital technology¹ as one of the principles of the future operating model with specific refence to *IT systems enabling flexible working* and the *exploitation of proven robotics and artificial intelligence*. Our ability to access and integrate such technologies has been greatly enhanced by the development of the cloud and new the digital marketplace that has emerged as a result.
- 3.2. Though considerable advances have been made by joining councils, the technology estate on day one will include a significant number of legacy systems. Furthermore, as it will be, in large part, a simple amalgamation of IT from former councils, it will be relatively uncoordinated and will have inbuilt inefficiencies.

¹ Page 66, Table 16.

3.3. A piecemeal, uncoordinated, and reactive approach to developing the technology estate will not deliver the benefits envisaged by LGR, nor deliver the quality of services rightly demanded by the public. A strategic approach, which will over time demand investment and organisational change, is required and this strategy lays the foundations for such an approach.

4. Other options considered

4.1. There is no viable alternative to having a technology strategy. Without one, the new council would be institutionalising a mixed and incoherent suite of technologies that would be increasingly costly to maintain and would fail to meet user and customer expectations.

4.2. This strategy promotes the vision of actively managing technology. It describes an organisation that has the capability to develop and integrate, as well as commission, and challenges the new organisation to embrace new technologies. An alternative option would be to settle for an IT department focussed on running and supporting existing services with little or no capacity for service improvement or innovation, and a limited capacity to respond to changing user needs. This was not the vision laid out in the One Somerset Business Case.

5. Links to County Vision, Business Plan and Medium-Term Financial Strategy

5.1. The Corporate Plan, which incorporates the Council Plan and Business Plan, is in draft form. However, the proposed priorities and principles speak to the importance of a digital, data and technology for Somerset Council. The technology strategy is key to delivering the digital agenda, which in turn is key to delivering the county vision and business plan.

5.2. Rationalisation of Somerset Council's technology estate is fundamental to achieving MTFP savings and achieving longer term financial sustainability – without prejudicing service standards.

6. Consultations and co-production

6.1. This strategy has been developed under the aegis of the LGR Technical Assets Optimisation Workstream, and so has benefited from the continual involvement of officers from across all 5 joining authorities.

6.2. Gartner associates (Somerset Council strategic technical partner) have reviewed two earlier drafts of this strategy.

6.3. This strategy has been developed in close coordination with both the Digital Strategy and the Data Strategy and has been briefed to Customer Community and Partnership (CCP) and Service Alignment and Improvement (SAI) workstreams.

6.4. The draft strategy was endorsed by the LGR Programme Board on 13 December 2022.

7. Financial and Risk Implications

7.1. Implications for new unitary council

7.1.1. It has been established that well planned and well implemented technology saves money in the long term, whereas poorly planned, poorly

implemented technology results in poor value for money. This strategy aims to establish a future in which the deployment of technology is properly governed, and the digital marketplace is managed to ensure best return on investment.

7.1.2. At this current point in time this Interim Technology Strategy is not costed. It sets out a high-level vision for the future. The implications of this vision will mean at times there will be a need for additional future investment, and the realisable cashable benefits may take time. Discrete programmes will fall out of the strategy, and these will be individually subject to investment appraisals.

7.1.3. The strategy gives the context for budget setting and MTFP and to that extent financial implications are bounded by existing controls.

7.2. Risks

7.2.1. **Business Change.** Successful consolidation and modernisation of technologies will require business change, across a new council already pressurised by other organisational change demands. Technology changes must be introduced with careful change management strategies, always service/business led, and implemented by multidisciplinary teams – including, but not solely made up of, technical staff.

7.2.2. **Service Continuity.** As systems are consolidated and modernised, on-going services must continue to be delivered. Methods such as user testing, parallel operation models, and agile delivery exist that can help ensure service continuity, but they must be properly planned and resourced.

7.2.3. **Capacity.** The scale and scope of change inherent in LGR, and proposed by this strategy, will be resource intensive. If organic capacity does not exist, resource may have to be bought in.

8. Legal and HR Implications.

8.1. **Legal Implication.** There are no legal implications with noting this interim strategy.

8.2. **HR Implications.** The technology strategy promotes a council with the ability to develop systems and integrate technologies as well as commissioning platforms; it highlights the need to actively manage a diverse and dynamic digital marketplace; it recommends the formation of an emerging technologies/future horizon scanning team. Alongside the more traditional IT roles, these capabilities require specialised skills which may have an impact on how we recruit and retain staff.

8.3. **Ethics.** The use of technologies such as machine learning and artificial intelligence to support decision making, and greater exploitation of data raise important ethical questions. Digital ethics – how we should handle data and new technologies in a responsible manner – will need to be considered in future governance and oversight structures.

9. Other Implications

9.1. Equalities Implications.

9.1.1. Technology in and of itself has neither a positive nor negative equalities impact. If it is deployed without considering issues such as accessibility, it could have a detrimental impact. Conversely well implemented technology can have a very positive impact. This strategy is being produced in close coordination with the Digital Strategy which has inclusion as a core theme.

9.1.2. Individual technologies, systems and platforms will have an equalities impact assessment completed as part of their implementation.

9.2. **Community Safety Implications.** There are no community safety implications from this strategy.

9.3. **Sustainability Implications.** Individual technologies need to be judged separately in terms of their contribution to the sustainability agenda. However, through a reduction in commuting because of more remote working and a lower reliance on office consumables, technology has the potential to impact positively on the environment. Also cloud migration (a recommendation of the strategy) reduces the energy consumption and physical footprint of on-premise infrastructure

9.4. **Health and Safety Implications.** There are no health and safety implications from this strategy.

9.5. **Health and Wellbeing Implications.** Once again, this strategy is neutral on health and well-being. Technology is increasingly being used to enhance health and well-being, but conversely poorly planned and misused technologies can have a detrimental effect.

9.6. **Social Value.** A key element of the Technology Strategy is to use the cloud enabled digital marketplace to access more products and services from SMEs and start-ups, rather than using a limited number of large suppliers. As well as better value for money, this will deliver clear social value.

10. Scrutiny comments / recommendations:

10.1. This Strategy has not yet been considered by Scrutiny.

11. Background Papers

- Interim Technology Strategy for the New Somerset Council.
- Interim Digital Strategy for the New Somerset Council.
- Interim Data Strategy for the New Somerset Council.
- One Somerset Business Case



Somerset Equality Impact Assessment

Before completing this EIA please ensure you have read the EIA guidance notes – available from your Equality Officer

Organisation prepared for	Joint Scrutiny		
Version	1	Date Completed	28/12/22
Description of what is being impact assessed			
Somerset Council's Interim Technology Strategy			
Evidence			
What data/information have you used to assess how this policy/service might impact on protected groups? Sources such as the Office of National Statistics , Somerset Intelligence Partnership , Somerset's Joint Strategic Needs Analysis (JSNA) , Staff and/ or area profiles ,, should be detailed here			
Open-source information including: The Equality Trust (www.equalitytrust.org.uk), LGA Digital Inclusion Toolkit, Ofcom Connected Nations Report, LGR Digital Strategy.			
Who have you consulted with to assess possible impact on protected groups? If you have not consulted other people, please explain why?			
Dave Crisfield – Equalities Advisor SSDC			

Analysis of impact on protected groups

The Public Sector Equality Duty requires us to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations with protected groups. Consider how this policy/service will achieve these aims. In the table below, using the evidence outlined above and your own understanding, detail what considerations and potential impacts against each of the three aims of the Public Sector Equality Duty. Based on this information, make an assessment of the likely outcome, before you have implemented any mitigation.

Protected group	Summary of impact	Negative outcome	Neutral outcome	Positive outcome
Age	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Anecdotally older people are less comfortable using technology. This is addressed by the digital inclusion policies outlined in the digital strategy. 	☒	☐	☐
Disability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Certain disabilities can be helped by technology. Assistive technologies are used to ensure that no one is disadvantaged due to disability. 	☐	☒	☐
Gender reassignment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> n/a 	☐	☒	☐
Marriage and civil partnership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> n/a 	☐	☒	☐

Pregnancy and maternity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> n/a 	□	⊗	□
Race and ethnicity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> n/a 	□	⊗	□
Religion or belief	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> n/a 	□	⊗	□
Sex	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> n/a 	□	⊗	□
Sexual orientation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> n/a 	□	⊗	□
Other, e.g. carers, veterans, homeless, low income, rurality/isolation, etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Low income can affect an individual's ability to access devices which in turn might limit their ability to access technology enabled services. Poor connectivity due to rural isolation may limit the deployment of some technologies. 	⊗	□	□

Negative outcomes action plan

Where you have ascertained that there will potentially be negative outcomes, you are required to mitigate the impact of these. Please detail below the actions that you intend to take.

Action taken/to be taken	Date	Person responsible	How will it be monitored?	Action complete
Age. Digital inclusion plans as part of Digital Strategy	15/12/2022			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Low income. Customer access portals, publicly available terminals in e.g. libraries and face to face services are available.	15/12/2022			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Rural Isolation. Connecting Devon and Somerset (CDS) is a government sponsored programme to connect hard to reach communities. On-going.	15/12/2022			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Select date			<input type="checkbox"/>
	Select date			<input type="checkbox"/>
	Select date			<input type="checkbox"/>
	Select date			<input type="checkbox"/>
	Select date			<input type="checkbox"/>

If negative impacts remain, please provide an explanation below.

Completed by:	Toffer Beattie
Date	28 Dec 22
Signed off by:	
Date	
Equality Lead/Manager sign off date:	
To be reviewed by: (officer name)	
Review date:	

