



# Doncaster Council

Date: 2<sup>nd</sup> November  
2020

To the Overview & Scrutiny Management Committee

## Digital Recovery & Renewal Strategy

Relevant Cabinet Member(s)	Wards Affected	Key Decision
Councillor Jane Nightingale		No

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The purpose of this report is to make the Overview & Scrutiny Management Committee aware of the Council Digital Response, Recovery & Renewal activities that have been and continue to be progressed through the Covid-19 crisis. The Strategy paper at **Appendix 1** developed in July includes the detail at that point in an environment that is continually changing.
2. If the Council had not continually invested in technology and digital ways of working for itself, St Leger Homes and Doncaster Children's Services Trust before the pandemic, all three organisations would have had problems continuing to function if Councillors and the majority of officers could not continue to run the Council from home. This was only achievable to the volume and extent required because of that investment.
3. Many more citizens have accessed services and information via the Council website during this time keeping them safer. Councillors can still operate and attend meetings virtually meaning Council business can continue. A large percentage of staff continue to deliver services from home to keep them safe. Staff who physically need to be on site or out in the borough to deliver services can still operate with the help of technology. Officers can talk to many citizens virtually in their homes if required and they have the facility whilst of course still having traditional channels open for those citizens who prefer them or do not have access to the internet.

4. Much of this would not have been possible without having the right digital tools and ways of working in place and in fact, some authorities who have not invested significant resources into digital have struggled to maintain services to the scale we have achieved, with some having to access technology in shifts due to technology capacity issues. It also reinforces why the Council needs to continue to keep up with technology so we are in a position to deal with anything that we must during these uncertain times.

## **EXEMPT REPORT**

5. N/A

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

6. This report recommends the Overview & Scrutiny Management Committee:
  - Consider and comment on the Digital Recovery & Renewal Strategy.

## **WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR THE CITIZENS OF DONCASTER?**

7. The ability to access digital Council services means that many citizens can self-serve access to services and information 24/7 if they wish to and have access. In addition, knowing their Council has the technology in place to ensure their critical services are not disrupted at a time of great need should reassure as well as ensure all the required services are delivered. This of course does not mean there will be no alternatives to accessing services on-line, not all citizens can, have or desire access to technology and connectivity.

## **BACKGROUND**

8. Like many others, our organisation had to change very quickly back in March 2020 from traditional mostly on-site and/or office based with some home working, to mostly home-based reliant on the use of technology. It also changed many of the ways we do things on a daily basis such as interaction with each other, communication with those we serve, how we operate internally and the delivery of services via alternative means.
9. If we had not invested significantly in the previous Digital Council Programme and the major technology upgrade projects completed in 2019, there is no doubt that we would have struggled to continue to function in the way that we have. Having many re-designed services on-line, moving our main technology and digital components to be cloud hosted and the way we have implemented our desktops, systems and security means we can access anytime anywhere in a secure and resilient environment. Many other organisations including local authorities have not been able to achieve this to the same extent. That said there is still so much more we could do, in particular what is digitally possible to assist in the care for vulnerable citizens.
10. The Strategy in **Appendix 1** seeks to deliver some of these things as well as explore the business case for others. It also sets out to collect Doncaster detailed information about who has access to technology, who does not and who does not

want to use it. The last consultation and data collection exercise on this subject was completed a few years ago and the current national data does not break this down in enough detail for Doncaster. The world has also changed, as have the needs of citizens living through a pandemic when access to technology is an even greater asset and need. The strategy was developed in July 2020, delivery has started, however due to the on-going pandemic events, and organisational capacity, some of the timescales will need to be changed. Team Doncaster partners are also involved in some of these initiatives.

## OPTIONS CONSIDERED

11. There are no options to consider in this particular report. The main objective is to communicate this reactive Digital Recovery & Renewal Strategy for Doncaster Council.

## REASONS FOR RECOMMENDED OPTION

12. N/A

## IMPACT ON THE COUNCIL'S KEY OUTCOMES

13.

	Outcomes	Implications
	<p><b>Doncaster Working:</b> Our vision is for more people to be able to pursue their ambitions through work that gives them and Doncaster a brighter and prosperous future;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Better access to good fulfilling work</li> <li>• Doncaster businesses are supported to flourish</li> <li>• Inward Investment</li> </ul>	
	<p><b>Doncaster Living:</b> Our vision is for Doncaster's people to live in a borough that is vibrant and full of opportunity, where people enjoy spending time;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The town centres are the beating heart of Doncaster</li> <li>• More people can live in a good quality, affordable home</li> <li>• Healthy and Vibrant Communities through Physical Activity and Sport</li> <li>• Everyone takes responsibility for keeping Doncaster Clean</li> <li>• Building on our cultural, artistic and sporting heritage</li> </ul>	
	<p><b>Doncaster Learning:</b> Our vision is for learning that prepares all children,</p>	

	<p>young people and adults for a life that is fulfilling;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Every child has life-changing learning experiences within and beyond school</li> <li>• Many more great teachers work in Doncaster Schools that are good or better</li> <li>• Learning in Doncaster prepares young people for the world of work</li> </ul>	
	<p><b>Doncaster Caring:</b> Our vision is for a borough that cares together for its most vulnerable residents;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children have the best start in life</li> <li>• Vulnerable families and individuals have support from someone they trust</li> <li>• Older people can live well and independently in their own homes.</li> </ul>	
	<p><b>Connected Council:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A modern, efficient and flexible workforce</li> <li>• Modern, accessible customer interactions</li> <li>• Operating within our resources and delivering value for money</li> <li>• A co-ordinated, whole person, whole life focus on the needs and aspirations of residents</li> <li>• Building community resilience and self-reliance by connecting community assets and strengths</li> <li>• Working with our partners and residents to provide effective leadership and governance</li> </ul>	<p>The right digital tools in place contribute to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- a modern, efficient and flexible workforce;</li> <li>- modern, accessible customer interactions;</li> <li>- the ability to work within our resources; and</li> <li>- improved value for money.</li> </ul>

## RISKS AND ASSUMPTIONS

14. The assumption is that all national digital connectivity continues to operate via its various providers so the internet services to homes, citizens, Councillors and staff are not disrupted.
15. The biggest risk when operating digitally is cyber security. This is a strategic risk for the Council and activity is continually monitored and blocked where relevant using best practice tools and other technology infrastructure designed for this

function. Councillors and staff are also continually asked to complete training and to always, be vigilant.

#### **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS [Officer Initials SRF Date 13/10/2020 ]**

16. There are no legal implications arising out of this report. Specific legal advice can be provided to the panel upon request.

#### **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS [Officer Initials PH Date 13/10/2020 ]**

17. There are no direct financial implications in this report.

#### **HUMAN RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS [Officer Initials KG Date 13/10/2020 ]**

18. There are no significant HR implications to this decision.

#### **TECHNOLOGY IMPLICATIONS [Officer Initials PW Date 15/10/2020 ]**

19. A number of quick wins identified in the Digital Recovery & Renewal Strategy have been delivered to date including:

- The further roll out and use of web chat across several high-volume processes (e.g. waste collection);
- Further implementation of gov notify and the Government Delivery Platform to improve digital communication to citizens and staff via email and text;
- Virtual democratic, public and partner meetings;
- Hybrid meeting room solutions including partners;
- Enhancements to online processes;
- Requirements gathering for future phases; and
- Procurement of a digital solution for Schools Catering.

20. High-level progress against the delivery of the strategy will continue to be monitored through the quarterly Technology Governance Board (TGB) and more closely via the 3 weekly Technology Portfolio Delivery Board chaired by the Assistant Director of Customers Digital & ICT which also monitors the delivery of anything technical.

#### **HEALTH IMPLICATIONS [Officer Initials SK Date 15/10/2020 ]**

21. Digital inclusion is a contributor to wellbeing. Conversely, digital exclusion can compound existing health and other inequalities. If important information and services are more easily accessed digitally this could cause unintended harm to people who are unable or do not wish to use digital services. While age is the main factor in digital exclusion, there are other determinants: low income, disability, learning difficulties, educational attainment, ethnicity, rurality, and language/literacy. People who are digitally excluded are likely to be those most in need of services. The depth of digital exclusion for people with disabilities is generally much greater than for the wider population. Accessibility, therefore, must be built into all digital offers. Similarly, development of our systems and

platforms should take consideration of e.g. older operating systems and different devices used to access services online.

22. Equitable application of a digital-forward approach will require focussed and culturally competent support. Similarly, there should be consideration of whose voices define what it looks like for the council to 'better serve' our citizens. Finally, it is important to consider existing biases in data for e.g. predictive work and AI-based functions to ensure existing biases are not compounded.
23. Issues of mental wellbeing and isolation, for example in the case of telehealth and care provided remotely, should be mitigated for employees and citizens. For some people health and care staff can be among their only social contact. The limitation of identifying welfare needs remotely must also be considered, for example in the case of people living with disabilities that could prevent them from having insight into their situation or from communicating their needs.
24. For employees the continued need to work remotely should lead to consideration of their situations such as disabilities and workspace/VLE set-up. Employees will need access to reliable, high-quality internet access and sufficient suitable home workspace, which not all will have. Not all will be able to afford this, and consideration must be given to how the council will offer equitable support to employees as well as citizens in that regard. This will be important for council officers as well as other employees across Team Doncaster to ensure that those receiving services from partners, are not treated unequally because of inadequate equipment, skills, or connectivity among staff who support them.
25. The proposal explains that changes to ways of working to a digital-forward approach that may mean that some services become online only with an in-person alternative offered for non-internet users. It will be important to consider the potential cost of time and transport to access services in-person that others can access online, as well as the increased risk of COVID transmission through travelling to council sites. There may be an increased risk of poorer COVID outcomes among those more likely also to be non-internet users through (age, ethnicity, and disability). The COVID risk inequalities must be considered alongside digital inequalities, and other non-digital but remote options for service provision should be considered.

#### **EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS [Officer Initials JG Date 12/10/20]**

26. The Council has duties under the Public Sector Equality Duty at s149 of the Equality Act 2010. The duty requires the Council, when exercising its functions, to have 'due regard' to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited under the act, and to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share a 'protected characteristic' and those that do not share that protected characteristic. Those who do not have the means or ability to use technology for whatever reason are being considered in the delivery of the strategy ensuring alternatives are available.

## **CONSULTATION**

27. This Digital Recovery & Renewal Strategy has been considered at the Council's Directors Meeting. Senior Management were also consulted and comments from staff surveys were used.

## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

28. **Appendix 1** – Digital Recovery & Renewal Strategy

## **REPORT AUTHOR & CONTRIBUTORS**

Julie Grant, Assistant Director, Customers, Digital & ICT  
Tel: 01302 862496 Email: [julie.grant@doncaster.gov.uk](mailto:julie.grant@doncaster.gov.uk)

**Debbie Hogg**  
**Director of Corporate Resources**