ANGUS COUNCIL

POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE – 10 DECEMBER 2024

DIGITAL AND DATA STRATEGIES

JOINT REPORT BY IAN LORIMER, DIRECTOR OF FINANCE AND SHARON FAULKNER, DIRECTOR OF HR, OD, DIGITAL ENABLEMENT, IT & BUSINESS SUPPORT

1.   ABSTRACT

1.1   This report presents the Council's Digital and Data Strategies which set out the Council's strategic approach to progressing these initiatives over the next three to four years. The Digital and Data Strategies have been brought to this committee for consideration as a joint report, due to the inextricable link between digital technologies and the data they produce and store.

2.   ALIGNMENT TO THE COUNCIL PLAN AND COUNCIL POLICIES

2.1   This report contributes to the priorities contained within the Council Plan, which focus on Caring for the Economy, Caring for our People, Caring for our Place and Angus Council is Efficient and Effective. This report links directly to the priorities to:

- Continue to develop 24/7 digital services to improve access to our services.
- Continue to develop and deliver our change programme.
- Deliver our statutory obligations and core functions, tailored to suit our available resources and making best use of our data/performance information.

3.   RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1   It is recommended that the Committee:-

(i)   approve the 'Digital Angus' Angus Council Digital Strategy 2025-2028 (Appendix 1 refers); and

(ii)   approve the Angus Council Data Strategy 2025-2028 (Appendix 2 refers).

4.   BACKGROUND

Digital Strategy

4.1   The current Digital Strategy was agreed by the full Council at its meeting on 10 May, 2018 (Report 157/18 refers). This included the Digital Strategy, Technology Roadmap and Angus Digital Work Plan.

Data Strategy

4.2   The need for the Data Strategy has mainly emerged from the Council's Performance Led (P-LED) programme which was initiated during 2018 and has underpinned the Council's performance management arrangements since that time.

4.3   Recent Internal Audit recommendations have highlighted the need to further develop this into a more robust Performance Management Framework. That is currently in development and will be the subject of a separate report to members in due course.

4.4   A key aspect of the learning from the P-LED programme so far, has been the need for improvement to our large amounts of data that we hold as an organisation.

5.   CURRENT POSITION

Digital Strategy

5.1   Good progress has been made with the current Digital Strategy, and key achievements have included:

- We implemented Microsoft 365, providing a modern communication and collaboration platform.

- We have moved much of our technology infrastructure and software applications to a public cloud environment.

- We have invested in our Customer Relationship Management (CRM) platform, to simplify the online delivery of many council services and processes (Pay, Report, Request, Apply).

- We have migrated many of our core software applications to fully managed, cloud hosted versions, providing enhanced functionality and delivering improved resilience and reliability.

- We have started to rationalise our software applications architecture, realising a more joined up approach to service delivery and ensuring value for money for our technology investment.

- We have delivered a new telephone and contact centre system, providing efficiencies and additional channels for customer contact.

- We have delivered a Managed Detection & Response (MDR) service, helping to protect ourselves against cyber threats.

Data Strategy

5.2 A Data Maturity Assessment was completed, supported by the Scottish Government, which has provided a baseline for developing a data strategy. This has been referenced in Best Value action plan updates to members as part of corporate governance reports since June 2023.

6. PROPOSALS

Introduction

6.1 The Digital and Data Strategies have been brought to this committee for consideration as a joint report, due to the inextricable link between digital technologies and the data they produce and store. Neither can perform to its optimum without the other, and therefore the joint commitment to progress these strategies in tandem highlights the council's intentions to synergise the implementation of these key enabling initiatives.

Digital Strategy

6.2 Digital and information technologies have transformed the world we live in on an unprecedented scale and we will continue to see exponential growth of emerging digital technologies transforming every aspect of our lives and how we engage and interact with the world around us. The effect of digital and information technologies has been to revolutionise travel, shopping, banking and social interactions and this consumerisation of digital has fuelled a desire and demand for technology to be used to modernise the delivery of public services.

6.3 This Digital Strategy has been developed to support the Delivery of our Council Plan 2023-28 and our Angus Community Plan 2022-2030 and with a clear focus on ensuring technology is a key enabler, supporting the delivery of the Council's vision and priorities. The strategy is not solely about digital technology, it is about supporting the delivery of people-centred services in a digital age.

6.4 The Digital Strategy is based on research and engagement with all our services and is aligned with the Digital Strategy for Scotland, A changing nation: how Scotland will thrive in a digital world and Scotland's Digital Health and Care Strategy, Enabling, Connecting and Empowering: Care in the Digital Age.

6.5 The demand for council services has never been greater and the financial challenges we face are enormous, meaning there is little choice but to reimagine and redesign how we deliver all our services. Digital and information technologies are a key enabler to support the delivery of high quality, customer-centric and future-focussed public services and this Digital Strategy provides a strategic framework to support the delivery of these services.

6.6 A key theme of our Digital Strategy will be digital inclusion and there will be a strong focus on designing and supporting digital services to ensure no one is left behind or faces inequalities as a result of their digital situation. We will actively develop initiatives to increase digital inclusion within our communities, with a focus on digital skills, connectivity, access and infrastructure, and accessibility.

Data Strategy

6.7 In today's world, the volume of data is growing exponentially, and data is being used to drive change and make decisions on an increasingly large scale. This digital/ data revolution is creating new opportunities through the expansive generation of new data. Keeping pace with that revolution is critical to achieving success for organisations across all industries and sectors. At a time of very constrained resources within public services it is more important than ever that good quality data is used to inform the difficult choices which need to be made about how and where to use scarce resources.

6.8 Data is thus a vital asset for the Council to propel innovation, provide clear business insights, and help transform the organisation to meet ever changing business needs and societal demands.

6.9 This data strategy therefore outlines the overarching approach for driving greater value from the Council's wide-ranging and expanding data resource. Its primary purpose is to progress our use of data and analysis across the organisation in order to:

- target services/ interventions, to improve the customer experience for people using Council services, where this is possible and deliverable within Angus Council's finite resources; and

- inform strategic planning and better-informed decision making, to improve impact and outcomes from the services the Council provides, along with identifying opportunities for change and improvement.

6.10 The strategy establishes a strategic framework for improvement and change activities that includes robust data foundations to build from; efficient systems architecture to manage information flows; effective governance controls that support the responsible, ethical and secure use of data; forward-looking investment plans to develop data skills and data analytics capabilities, along with a phased timeline that will guide the Council forward over the next three-to-four years.

6.11 This data strategy is therefore ultimately aimed at improving the value the Council drives from its data to support Angus Council deliver its strategic vision that: Angus is a great place to live, work and visit.

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

7.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from the recommendations of this report. However as part of the implementation of these strategies, financial provision has been made in the current Capital Plan to support investment where this is required.

7.2 Investment decisions and reporting arrangements relating to the use of that financial provision within the Capital Plan will be made in accordance with the Council's Scheme of Governance. There is an expectation that investment to support the Digital and Data Strategies covered by this report will deliver a range of financial and non-financial benefits from the Council and these will be captured in future years budgets.

8. RISK MANAGEMENT

8.1 There are no specific risks arising from the recommendations of this report. However progressing the Digital and Data strategies will help to provide mitigation and increase internal controls in relation to the following corporate risks:

- Transforming for the Future
- Performance Management
- Information Governance

9. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 There are no direct environmental implications arising from the recommendations of this report.

10. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT, HUMAN RIGHTS AND FAIRER SCOTLAND DUTY

Digital Strategy

10.1 An Equality Impact Assessments for the Digital Strategy has been carried out and is attached.

Data Strategy

10.2 A screening assessment has been undertaken for the Data Strategy and a full Equality Impact Assessment is not required for the following reasons: the strategy is an initiative that will not directly impact people and is technical in nature, as it relates to how the council manages its internal systems, processes, skills and tools in relation to managing data as an asset.

11. CHILDRENS RIGHTS AND WELLBEING IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Digital Strategy

11.1 Childrens Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessments for the Digital Strategy have been carried out within the EIA.

Data Strategy

11.2 A Childrens Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment for the Data Strategy has been undertaken and a full assessment is not required as the "General Principles" do not apply to this proposal.

12. CONSULTATION

12.1 The Chief Executive and all Directors have been consulted in the preparation of this report.

NOTE: No background papers, as detailed by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 (other than any containing confidential or exempt information) were relied on to a material extent in preparing the above report.

REPORT AUTHORS: Gordon Cargill, Service Leader (Governance, Change & Strategic Policy) and Andrew Howe, Service Leader (Digital Enablement and IT)

EMAIL DETAILS: CargillGP@angus.gov.uk and HoweA@angus.gov.uk

List of Appendices:

Appendix 1: Digital Strategy 2025 – 2028
Appendix 2: Data Strategy 2025-2028
Appendix 3: Equality Impact Assessment