

DRAFT REPORT OF THE DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION SCRUTINY PANEL

Foreword by Councillor Brookes, Chair of the Scrutiny Panel

Today we live in a society in which is highly reliant on digital services. This is even more so following the Covid-19 Pandemic. Many of us use digital services for shopping, booking appointments and working. It is vital that we, as a Council, ensure we meet the expectations of our customers by providing the most convenient and easy to use services. At the same time, the Council faces a shrinking funding base and the need to identify ways to make services more efficient. This report sets out the findings and recommendations of the Digital Transformation Scrutiny Panel which sought to gain information into how the Council can further support the digital offering of Council services and to make recommendations as appropriate.

The Panel would like to thank the internal and external witnesses who gave up their time to provide evidence to assist the Panel with its deliberations. These individuals are outlined in Section 4.

1. Background

The topic for this Panel was agreed at the meeting of the Scrutiny Commission on 28th June 2021 and agreed to be progressed at the meeting of the Scrutiny Commission on 10th January 2022.

The Panel's first meeting was on 28th February 2022, followed by subsequent meetings on 29th March 2022 and 27th April 2022. After the third meeting the Panel concluded its initial business on 16th June 2022.

2. Panel Membership

Chair: Councillor Brookes

Councillors Charles, Gerrard, Hamilton, Needham, Seaton.

3. Terms of Reference and Reason for Scrutiny

The Panel's Terms of Reference, agreed by the Panel at its initial meeting on 28th February 2022 and confirmed by Scrutiny Commission on 10th January 2022 were as follows:

This panel will:

- *Identify which forms were most used throughout lockdown and whether more forms should be created to support our customers*
- *Identify whether there is a need to create a personalised front-end login portal*
- *If there is a need, would this be for:*
 - *All customers*
 - *Council tenants only*
 - *Another key customer group*
- *If a front end portal is required, what information should be displayed and how will this integrate with existing software.*
- *Identify economies of scale and potential savings for the Council and/ or service.*

The Scope Document for the scrutiny review undertaken by the Panel is attached at **Appendix 1**. This sets out the above Terms of Reference and Reason for Scrutiny. The document outlines the position at the conclusion of the Panel's work and, therefore, includes additional stakeholders and resources identified by the Panel as its work progressed, notes added to assist the Panel, and a summary of the progress made by the Panel.

4. Evidence, Stakeholders and Witnesses

The Panel received information from the following stakeholders and witnesses:

Information from officers within the Council

- Introduction from Head of Customer Experience on the current position with respect to commercial income generation
- Updates and further information as requested from the Head of Customer Experience and the Information Technology Delivery Manager.
- A demonstration and guidance on the Council's i-Map mapping portal from the Head of Planning and Regeneration.
- Discussion on the communications and marketing strategies used by the Council from the Communications Manager.

Information from other Councils

- Discussion and information regarding the 'Digital Coventry' report from Head of IT and Digital at Coventry City Council, Paul Ward.

Information from other sources

- Insight from Lead Member for Transformation, Councillor Rollings.
- Research findings from panel members on website experience of other Councils and in the private sector and apps used by other Councils and in the private sector.

Documentation

The Panel reviewed documentation as follows:

- Charnwood Borough Council [Corporate Strategy 2020-24](#)
- Charnwood Borough Council [Customer Service Strategy 2022-25](#)
- Charnwood Borough Council [ICT Strategy 2021-23](#)
- McKinsey and Company – [A global view of how consumer behaviour is changing amid Covid-19](#)
- Lloyd's Bank – [UK Consumer Digital Index 2021](#)
- Lloyd's Bank – [Essential Digital Skills Report 2021](#)
- Coventry City Council - [Digital Coventry](#)
- Citizens Online – [Digital Inclusion in Charnwood](#)

Technical Support was provided to the Panel by:

- Karen Barnshaw – Head of Customer Experience
- Ayman Khan – Information Technology Delivery Manager

5. Summaries of Panel Meetings

Summaries of the work undertaken at each meeting of the Panel are set out in the "Progress of Panel Work" section of the Scope Document at **Appendix 1**.

Full details of the information provided by witnesses and the issues considered by the Panel are detailed in the notes of the Panel's meetings listed in Background Papers section of this report, also attached at **Appendices 2**.

The Panel met a total of four times as follows:

- Meeting 1 – 28th February 2022
- Meeting 2 – 29th March 2022
- Meeting 3 – 27th April 2022
- Meeting 4 – 16th June 2022

6. Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)

The Improvement and Organisational Development Manager stated that the need for an Equality Impact Assessment would be considered following the final submission of the report. (to be confirmed).

7. Key Findings

The Panel obtained evidence from a range of sources both internal and external as described in Section 4 above. In doing so the Panel made use of the evidence provided of practice at other councils and organisations with different digital offerings. The following summarises the key findings of the evidence considered by the Panel.

Ideas for Digitally Transforming Services

The Panel considered methods by which the Council could implement digital transformation where it was not already planned. Considering evidence provided, suggestions included:

1. Developing an app which could be used by customers to make interactions with the Council easier.
2. Developing a 'hook' which would encourage residents to download an app and continue to use it. A hook would also be beneficial if the Council decided not to develop an app but to promote use of the website more. Some suggestions included continually promoting the benefits of using online services over other methods (time, convenience), ensuring online services are very easy to use and unlikely to cause issues and to link online services to high profile events, such as the Queen's Jubilee.
3. That the Council further developed its virtual meetings capacity to allow residents to meet with officers and customer services through virtual platforms.
4. That the Council's website could be simplified for ease of use and to encourage more engagement.
5. That members of the Council become more involved in the digital transformation of the Council. This might include members receiving training to become 'Digital Champions' within their communities, as well as becoming more active on social media.
6. That Parish Councils and Parish Clerks become involved in the digital transformation processes by working with the Council to identify potentially hard to reach members of the public that may be digitally excluded.
7. That after initially requesting a survey of Charnwood residents to understand their requirements and preferences with regards to the digital transformation of services, this was no longer needed.

Developing an App

The panel had initially felt that the development of an app would be beneficial as it would allow residents to quickly and easily interact with the Council. It was highlighted that many people find using a smart phone easier than using a computer and so it was felt that an app would increase the number of residents interacting with the Council through digital channels. The panel compiled a list of other Councils that had developed an app and were tasked undertake research relating to this.

Following this research, and after further information provided from the Head of Customer Experience and the Head of IT and Digital at Coventry City Council, the panel decided that the development of an app to increase resident engagement was not viable. Other Councils had had negative experiences following the launch of an app and usage rates were typically low. In addition, the cost of developing of an app would be substantial and was not within the Council's budget.

Identifying a 'Hook'

Evidence from the Head of Customer Experience, the Head of IT and Digital at Coventry City Council and the Communications Manager had suggested that the identification of a 'hook' would be beneficial in the digital transformation of services. Across other local authorities, online portal usage rates were low. In order to improve engagement, it was necessary to find an incentive to encourage customers to start using online services and then continue to use them.

It was estimated that 80-90% of customers made contact with the Council once a year at present, so it was difficult to incentivize use of online services. The panel were informed that a neighbouring authority had only 5% of total residents regularly using the online services provided by the Council. It was explained that this 5% of residents were mainly accessing self service functions on the Council's online portal, involving accessing financial support.

At a subsequent meeting, the panel received information on the most used online forms and the least used online forms available through the Charnwood Borough Council's website in order to try to identify reasons why some forms were more used than others.

A number of solutions were suggested for 'hooking' customers and retaining their interest. For example, continual promotion of the Council's online services (via social media, during telephone calls with customers). Another example was to ensure the online offering was simple and easy to use and caused very few issues in order to encourage customers to return to the website over using other channels. A further example was to tie online services into other popular events or services. Booking a popular service could require customers to sign up to the portal, such as using a tip.

Digital Inclusion

It was highlighted that digital inclusion remained an issue within the Borough. There are large rural areas within Charnwood which may not have sufficient broadband capacity to support some of the Council's digital services. In addition, the panel reviewed a digital skills gap analysis which was undertaken in 2020, detailing the estimated digital exclusion risk. There are also many individuals within the Borough that do not want to engage with the Council through digitally, preferring more traditional channels.

The Council continues to support more traditional communication channels such as telephone and in-person conversations, and the Council's Transformation Service Reviews are ongoing to ensure all departments within the Council are updated to provide the best customer service experience possible, and this includes creating easier and more convenient services for the customer. Therefore, the Council is committed to support customers in using online services where possible.

It was highlighted that some members of the community that were at risk of digital exclusion were difficult to reach. In order to overcome this, the Council attempted to reach these customers through offline channels such as through partner agencies working within the community. It was suggested that working with Parish Councils and Parish Clerks may be beneficial to further improve contact with hard to reach members of the community.

It was also highlighted that members of the Council were a valuable resource in connecting with members of the public. It was suggested that members could consider becoming digital champions within their wards, assisting residents to become more comfortable with the online services offered by the council or promoting what is available.

Ongoing Digital Transformation

At the first meeting of the panel, the Head of Customer Experience gave an outline of the Transformation Service Reviews. Information was provided on areas that each department within the Council had identified could be transformed in order to improve efficiency. The panel was informed that a significant amount of work was already in progress and that some of this would involve digital transformation of services. This included the improvement of the i-Map feature demonstrated by the Head of Planning and Regeneration at the panel's second meeting.

The website management contract was due to be procured in 2023. This would provide some opportunities for upgrading the website. The Panel felt that the procurement should be scrutinized by the Scrutiny Commission at the relevant time.

After receiving information from the Head of Customer Experience, the Information Technology Delivery Manager and the Lead Member for Transformation, the panel acknowledged that the work being undertaken and planned in the future involved all areas of the Council and would substantially improve the digital offer of the Council.

9. Recommendations made by the Panel

In undertaking its work the Panel reached **xxxxx** conclusions regarding how the council could improve digital transformation

The Panel also concluded that

The Panel is making the following recommendations to address these issues.

Recommendations to the Cabinet

Recommendations

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

reasons

Observations

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
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10. Background Papers

Agenda Papers and Notes of Panel meetings available on the Council's website at:

<https://charnwood.moderngov.co.uk/ieListMeetings.aspx?CId=251&Year=0>

Appendix 1 - Scope Document

Appendix 2 – Meetings Notes – 28th February 2022, 29th March 2022, 27th April 2022, 16th June 2022