

Information Technology & Digital Transformation Advisory Committee

Minutes of a Virtual Meeting of the Information Technology and Digital Transformation Advisory Committee held on 16th March 2021.

Present:

Cllr. Forest

Cllrs. Krause, Ovenden, Pickering.

Apology:

Cllr. Shorter.

Also Present:

Cllrs. Chilton, Feacey, Ledger, Spain, Sparks.

Customer Service & Digital Project Manager, IT Manager, Member Services Officer.

1 Minutes of the Meeting held on 17th November 2020

- 1.1 The Minutes of the Meeting of the IT & Digital Transformation Advisory Committee held on 17th November 2020 were approved and confirmed as a correct record.

2 Digital Project Update

- 2.1 The Portfolio Holder introduced this item and highlighted how the Council had made digital progression a priority and transported Members into the 21st Century in terms of digital technology. He outlined the numerous projects currently being undertaken or completed, including Garden Waste, ANPR at Elwick Place car park, garage hire, the corporate website, Aspire, rough sleepers, Victoria Park to name just a few. He expressed his appreciation to the Customer Service & Digital Project Manager, IT Manager and their teams for all of their hard work and input into the project
- 2.2 The Customer Service & Digital Project Manager went onto describe how the Team had continued their efforts, working remotely throughout the pandemic, and also acknowledged the work the IT Team had undertaken to support them. He then gave an update on some aspects of the Council's digital programme, including the implementation of Yoti Sign, and on-going work on the Report It app and Abavus. Process mapping within the Customer Services Team was a current priority and Environment and Land Management Service was the first area under review, since this subject was the second most popular page to be viewed, after Planning. Work on the

Aspire website had been completed and had enabled the team to develop a template for smaller websites coming forward in the future. Work was currently underway on developing a system on Abavus for online sports pitch bookings, and a shift pattern system was being explored for Ashford Port Health. He went onto speak about the new Planning System, which would be developed via Arcus Global. This would be developed over 2 phases, the first was to improve the processes and the second was the technology upgrade.

Discussing further work requests he advised that Food hygiene was being reviewed to enable remote and digital workflow for delivery of regulatory and statutory duties relating to Food Hygiene, Health & Safety and Animal Licensing.

The current database (Northgate M3) was of limited duration and work would need to commence to procure a new system. This would ideally happen once the Planning system (Arcus global) had been implemented, as this may be an option for the M3 replacement. In the meantime, this provided an opportunity to improve the ways of working and operational outcomes, and would be the focus of the project. The project was likely to be rolled out in two stages. The first developing improved systems using existing systems such as ABAVUS for electronic forms, with the second stage being full integration once the long-term database had been agreed.

2.3 The Chairman thanked the Customer Service & Digital Project Manager for his comprehensive update. The item was then opened up to the Task Group and the following points/questions were raised:

- A Member expressed disappointment that the Planning system would not be complete until 2022 and said that constituents were becoming increasingly frustrated with the current system and the inability to be able to contact staff in Planning. The IT Manager explained that their focus was on developing a system that was fit for purpose and realistically this meant allowing a sufficient timeframe. If modules were developed and finished earlier, it may be possible to release those for use along the way. The Portfolio Holder added that the Planning departmental restructure needed to be taken into consideration also and the licence for the current Planning system expired in March 2022.
- A Member asked whether the new Planning system would be all-encompassing, and whether the current GIS system would be updated. The IT manager advised that due to the current planning system constraints some areas of GIS had not been able to be brought up to the current version which may have caused issues – this would be resolved with the new system.
- In response to a query regarding the Sports Pitch booking system, the Customer Service & Digital Project Manager confirmed that currently this was only available for Council owned pitches, but the option to include externally run facilities could be explored in the future. He added that contractual issues may prove problematic, but the functionality would be there.

- The Portfolio Holder for Community Safety and Wellbeing voiced his full support for the Food Hygiene Project. He went onto ask whether it was necessary to wait for the Planning system to be introduced for work to start on the replacement. The Customer Service & Digital Project Manager explained that there was a resource issue and he needed to ensure a team was in place to be able to deliver the new system. He added that it would be beneficial to see how the Planning project played out and to make sure that it was the right system moving forward. A Member queried whether the Abavus system could be used for this and the Customer Service & Digital Project Manager explained that whilst the initial form was part of work within Abavus, it did not have the functionality that M3 already provided so would not be suitable in this instance.

Resolved:

That the update be received and noted.

3 Update on Corporate Security

- 3.1 The IT Manager introduced this item, explaining that this centred mainly on cyber security. He confirmed that there had been one incident over the last three months whereby a staff members credentials had been compromised. Thankfully, an Officer in the Finance Team had sensed that certain details on an invoice were not correct and after contacting the supplier, they were able to prevent the payment from being processed. He accredited the mandatory cyber training in helping the Officer to recognise the deviations in that particular case. He encouraged all Members to undertake the training if they had not already done so.
- 3.2 Other incidents of national/international security breaches included the recent compromise to the Microsoft Exchange server, which had affected some local government authorities. ABC's IT dept. ran regular scans to identify this type of threat, and sat within the Kent Public Services Network, which provided an extra layer of defence to the council.
- 3.3 The IT Department had been externally audited twice over the last year. MHLCG had invited the department to be audited, and it was felt this was good practice since three local authorities had been exposed to cyber threats in recent times. The findings highlighted some weaknesses that the IT Manager explained were already being rolled out, including multi factor authentication. The Department had since received £200k funding for completing the audit and were exploring the best ways to use this, although there were some covenants on how the funding could be spent.
- 3.4 The Chairman thanked the IT Manager for the update and enquired about whether any future Dojo training sessions were planned, to which it was confirmed that this was in the pipeline and would be publicised once confirmed.

Resolved:

That the update be received and noted.

4 Future Agenda Items and Report Tracker

4.1 The Customer Service & Digital Project Manager introduced the report and spoke to the Committee about suggestions for agenda items for future Committee meetings. His report outlined the terms of reference for the Committee and had outlined suggested topics for future review including:

- Regular progress updates of the Councils corporate digital programme
- A presentation from project managers of current projects
- Revisiting original areas supported by the IT Committee intended to be the core of the strategy 2020-2025
- 6 monthly updates on the Councils Cyber Security measures
- Current technology and whether the Council is utilising it to its best use
- Lessons learnt from the pandemic
- A yearly update on Broadband and connectivity in the Borough

4.2 The Chairman agreed with the suggested topics and welcomed the updates on the project progress and broadband. The Group spoke about the topic of best use of current technology, with Modern.Gov and Microsoft Teams in mind, and a Member commented that more often, difficulties arose owing to password issues or software updates. He added that a refresher training session could prove useful for Members, after the prolonged period of working remotely.

4.3 Further discussion took place regarding the various devices available for use by Members and the IT Manager confirmed that the iPad continued to be the favoured device by the Council. He added that the laptops that had been loaned to Members during the pandemic would soon need to be returned.

Resolved:

That the Report be received and noted.

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