

RESOURCES AND SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

3 DECEMBER 2020

REPORT OF DEPUTY LEADER, PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR CORPORATE FINANCE AND GOVERNANCE

A.1 UPDATE ON THE TRANSFORMATION OF DIGITAL SERVICES

(Report prepared by John Higgins)

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

The purpose of this report is to update the committee on the transformation progress specifically from an IT/ digital perspective. Namely;

1. The '*My Tendring*' customer self-service portal.
2. Cloud Migration, Business Continuity And Flexible Working
3. The council's Leisure and Tourism App.
4. Re-Design of the Council's Data (and voice) Network
5. The Five9s contact centre application
6. Councillors' IT.

BACKGROUND

The Chairman of the Resources and Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee requested on 25th August 2020 that members of the Transformation Project Board should provide the committee with an update of the progress made.

The council's single greatest asset is its people - councillors and staff. Council operations are complex and offer 198 separate services. Like all modern organisations, the council is fundamentally reliant upon IT to deliver those services to residents, customers, visitors, councillors and staff. Consequently, IT and the council's Digital journey is a key strand running through our transformation modernisation agenda.

This report details the developments and improvements that have been achieved in the delivery of digital services, namely;

- Digital Transformation .
- Building modernisation – digital access.
- Councillors' IT.

Cabinet approved the Digital Transformation report 16 February 2018. The programme of adopted works over a two year period comprised three key project development strands, as follows;

1. A new '*My Tendring*' customer self-service portal.
2. Cloud Migration, Business Continuity And Flexible Working
3. A new Tendring Leisure and Tourism App.

Following adoption of the Council's Office transformation programme, a fourth digital strand intrinsically linked to the programme was added, as follows;

4. **Re-Design of the Council's Data (and voice) Network** to support operations throughout, and on completion of, the Office Transformation programme.

The council's converged communications strategy is based upon Microsoft Outlook (email and calendar) fully integrated with Microsoft Skype telephony, instant messaging and video calling. The councils' contact centre technology was provided by MITEL. However, once MITEL announced a strategic shift to stop supporting integration between their technology and Microsoft Skype it became a corporate priority to add a fifth digital strand, as follows;

5. **Deliver a new contact centre application** based upon the customer service team's functional requirements that fitted the council's strategies of Cloud Migration and Microsoft Skype compatibility.
6. **Councillors' IT.** The committee chairman has asked for an update on Members' IT which is discussed in section 6 of this briefing report.

DETAILED INFORMATION

1. **'My Tendring' Customer Self-Service Portal**

The application (App) purchased to provision and deliver the council's My Tendring self-service offering was the Firmstep product. During 2019 the Firmstep product was purchased by international application providers Grannicus.

The My Tendring portal works have been jointly developed and delivered through digital consultants Intergence and Amido working side-by-side with the council's customer services team and 5 fte council IT team members - a mix of system support and website support IT specialists.

From the outset of the Digital Transformation programme the adopted ethos has been one of external consultants working alongside and 'up-skilling' in-house IT specialists. However, as the programme has developed and evolved over time, likewise, the council's in-house application developer skills have matured.

The council's in-house Developer Team continues to go from strength to strength. In part due to hands-on engagement with the programme and direct consultant experience learning. And in part due to benefiting from formal academic training through collaboration between the Head of IT & Resilience IT and the Human Resources Development Manager.

Through utilising the government's Modern Apprenticeship scheme: 1 fte IT Systems Specialist has achieved a part-time IT under graduate degree (with honours), 2 fte are in their final year studying for a part-time IT under graduate degree (completion in 2020) and 1 fte has just commenced an Open University programming under graduate degree.

Utilising this new in-house Developer resource and new 'low code' Microsoft Power Applications the ongoing *My Tendring Portal* works ethos has evolved to further optimise transformation efficiency and best use of resources, as follows;

1. Works being undertaken solely by in-house council App Developers and customer service experts working with relevant council service experts.
2. Works, as above, but with limited external consultant's support utilising Intergence experts.
3. Works being delivered predominantly through Intergence consultants based upon a 'lift and shift then documented hand-over' ethos.

The Head of Customer and Commercial Services has written a separate report outlining the progress of the *My Tendring* Customer Access Portal from a customer services perspective.

The committee should be aware that the council has some 198 difference services to re-engineer and implement as fully self-service *My Tendring* portal solutions. This work is anticipated to be ongoing for the next 3-4 years.

However, the digital transformation work has already started to fundamentally change the way the council delivers services and is already starting to change council service structures internally.

Online self-service is increasingly the service choice for residents and customers with online digital capabilities. For those who chose to contact the council using more traditional methods telephony is their primary contact method.

The Covid-19 pandemic is a major factor for change with respect to how our residents and customers (and councillors and staff) engage with the council and our online and telephony contact volumes reflect this 'channel-shift'. It is not unreasonable to claim that the council would have struggled to provide the level of services that it has continued to deliver throughout the COVID-19 pandemic had it not undertaken its Digital Transformation programme.

The Digital Transformation resultant in-house Developer Team and their key digital contributions to council transformation and COVID-19 business continuity warrants a separate section, as follows;

1a) In-House IT Developer Team

As their technical capabilities, knowledge and confidence has grown the in-house IT Developer Team are increasingly demonstrating their abilities in applying technology to transform council services. Our reputation for quickly providing in-house solutions to existing and newly emerging problems is growing.

Based around the Digital Transformation suite of services and related applications, our Developer Team's digital transformational work includes;

- ✓ Working with HR to quickly develop COVID-19 databases to record and manage staff redeployment and staff shielding/ self-isolating – estimated cost avoidance £12,000.
- ✓ Working with the council COVID-19 shielding team to quickly creating new applications to contact, record and manage (CRM) resident shielding support and connection with local volunteer services – estimated cost avoidance £8,000.
- ✓ Developing a COVID-19 vulnerable persons mapping tool – estimated cost avoidance £17,500.
- ✓ Creation of a new council enforcement application to better record and manage enforcement case actions and provide a 'single council view' of enforcement – estimated cost avoidance £1,100 per on boarded service.

- ✓ Developing a Northgate compatible replacement electronic document records management system - Northgate quoted £110,650 capital and £34,500 revenue costs.
- ✓ Following the above we are developing an IDOX replacement corporate electronic document records management system that will reduce our corporate costs by £24,000 per annum.
- ✓ Developing a new application for scanning/ stock taking for engineering services - estimated cost avoidance of £17,500.
- ✓ Developing a new Tree Preservation application – estimated cost avoidance £8,000.
- ✓ Memorial bench and Play Areas fault management application – estimated cost avoidance £6,000.

2. Cloud Migration

Throughout each of the two council's Digital Transformation programmes of works (2013 – 2017 and the current 2017 – 2020 programme) a key strategic digital design thematic has been that of delivering/ further enhancing council digital business continuity.

A key strand of this work has been the migration of council applications from aging on-site hardware to 'pay as you go' hardware in a Microsoft data centre(s) called the Microsoft Azure Platform.

The Azure Platform is the platform of choice for a range of government sectors and partners, including the Ministry of Defence, a number of NHS bodies and at a more local level all of the Essex local authorities.

We have evolved our systems architecture to reflect staff and councillors accessing Apps and data 'in the Cloud'. The Cloud also gives significant additional cyber security functionality which has further strengthened our cyber security defences.

This was first put to the test when Tendring was snowbound for 48 hours during the '*Beast from the East*' in March 2018 when around 290 officers were working remotely from home during the two day period.

Obviously nobody could have predicted COVID-19 nor the effective closure of all council offices and shift from "*work flexibly from home or office*" to UK lock-down and "*Work from home if you can*". It is undeniable that the Digital Transformation Cloud-first and Cloud-migration strategy has significantly enhanced the council's business continuity and enabled us to deliver services throughout COVID-19 without any significant IT service outages.

Our Cloud migration programme was predicted to take 2 years and over the period our plans had extended by around 10-12 weeks with an estimated completion date of June 2020. However, COVID-19 demands required an urgent and sustained re-prioritisation of resources resulting in migration delays to the final 10% of our applications.

Therefore, whilst the programme is on track from a budget perspective it is significantly behind schedule from a final completion perspective. We are unlikely to complete the migration of the last few applications until early in 2021.

This delay has not caused any operational issues of note with the last 10% of applications and we are benefiting significantly from having 90% of our applications in the Cloud, including;

- ✓ Enhanced business continuity, resilience and data backup e.g. seamlessly moving from supporting office-based staff to staff operating effectively and efficiently from home during the pandemic.

- ✓ Using cloud-based Microsoft Skype and Teams to maintain operations and quickly introduce new ones e.g. virtual video staff meetings, committee and full council meetings.
- ✓ A move from periodic large capital IT server hardware outlay to more manageable 'pay as you go' monthly hardware revenue rental charges.
- ✓ A significant 'carbon neutral' reduction in on-site IT hardware power usage.
- ✓ The real-time ability to flexibly and quickly 'spin-up' additional Cloud hardware to deliver new services e.g. a new server for the council's COVID-19 activities; HR databases, Shielding databases and reactively in-house developed applications.
- ✓ Cloud efficiencies estimated at between 1 and 1.5fte with these resources re-deployed in supporting Members' IT related works, additional remote worker support requirements and in Developer Team activities.

3. Tendring Leisure and Tourism App

The Leisure and Tourism App was delivered in 2019 slightly under budget and with both Prince's Theatre and wider Tendring activities being promoted. The App had only just started to positively benefit our leisure and tourism industry (Theatre income was up and growing) before COVI-19 hit.

Picking up on the council's 'Back to Business' priority, the in-house IT Developer Team are re-using the existing application code whilst re-engineering the App in readiness for the 2021 season to not only promote leisure events but to create a more holistic suite of Tendring visitor information linked to digital mapping functionality, including;

- ✓ Car Park locations.
- ✓ Public toilet locations.
- ✓ Hospitals and public service delivery points.
- ✓ Linking real-time council Beach Patrol visitor advice reference beach crowd numbers and to generate a COVID-19 RAG beach visitor number status.
- ✓ As the App evolves further we are looking at the potential to add an area for businesses to advertise and promote themselves and any special offers etc.

This information has been shared and well received by both the Resources and Services Committee and with the Clacton Coastal Forum.

The App will be supported in-house by the council's IT Developer Team.

4. Re-Design of the Council's Data (and voice) Network

The committee will be aware that office transformation works are well advanced. From a digital perspective, we have taken the opportunity to completely re-cable the council's offices and further improve our office network resilience by creating a 'fibre ring' around the Town Hall (as opposed to areas served by separate cables).

At the same time we have further optimised our WiFi network and adopted a 'staff working wirelessly at all times' strategy. This enables staff (and councillors) to seamlessly move between locations with their devices. It further enhances staff and councillors having access to digital information at all times and a step-change reduction in reliance upon paper and printing.

The council has also worked through an Essex Online Partnership (EOLP) joint initiative to roll-out GovRoam to each of our offices. This means that as and when things return to a more normal working situation, officers and councillors will be able to use their Tendring user ID and password to log into any participating GovRoam partner's WiFi network just as if they were working at home or at a Tendring office location. Almost all of the EOLP

partners intend to roll-out GovRoam and it is already available at Essex County Council offices, Thurrock, Maldon and Basildon.

5. New Contact Centre Application (Five9s Application)

As briefly outlined previously, Mitel's strategically decided to stop supporting their contact centre's integration with Microsoft Skype (& Teams) telephony. With the council's unified communications strategy (voice & voice recording/ video calling & virtual meetings/ email, instant messaging/ calendar/ availability & presence) firmly embedded and mature around Microsoft products the council had to replace our Mitel contact centre.

Based upon the council's customer service team's functionality specifications, available budget and Cloud-first strategy, the FIVE9s product was selected and purchased. The product has an excellent reputation for service, reliability and value for money and is completely Cloud-based.

The product is a relatively new one from a council perspective and it is fair to say that we are still learning about its functionality and architecture. Shortly after it became operational (February 2020) the COVID-19 pandemic situation gripped the UK with resultant IT and information governance resourcing pressures across a whole range of existing, new, emergency and urgent council activities.

The council's contact centre has experienced a significant increase in call volumes that resulted an uncharacteristic drop in our levels of customer service. This was caused by call congestion e.g. insufficient telephone lines to cope with escalating demand together with insufficient staff resources. Reactive remedial action as now been taken and the situation has been resolved. Additionally, we are gaining a better understanding of the Five9s infrastructure and reporting and are moving from a position of reactive to pro-active reporting/ understanding.

It is worth noting that Essex County Council have just committed to migrating from their Mitel contact centre to emulate the same FIVE9s technology as Tendring. We are assisting them through our lessons learned.

It is additionally worth mentioning that the council currently has a hybrid application mix whereby the majority of officers and all councillors are using Microsoft Skype and a minority of officers are using (or testing) Microsoft Teams.

This hybrid mix is making fault-resolution extremely complex and we have reports of some calls not properly transferring to/ from the contact centre. It is therefore imperative that we move from this hybrid situation and migrate fully to Microsoft Teams as quickly as can be achieved and in any event by late January to avoid a large and unnecessary license renewal cost.

6. Members' IT

With Councillors having varying degrees of IT expertise the council identified an emerging picture where;

- × Some councillors were increasingly becoming disengaged - losing the ability to fully/ effectively engage with the range of digital information and services that the council operates.
- × Some councillors were struggling with their IT and asking council officers to fix their personal equipment – potentially creating an insurance liability issue.
- × The diversity of different councillor applications, all at different versions, was causing councillors to experience different IT problems causing unnecessary stress

and pressures for all concerned.

The emerging digital picture was perceived as an opportunity to assist councillors in their community leadership role. Through providing each councillor with a standard, managed device backed up by IT training and supported via the council's IT service desk our intended benefits and improvements were, and remain, as follows;

- ✓ To assisting councillors to improve their efficiency and access to stored digital information.
- ✓ Strengthen cybersecurity (and cybersecurity awareness) and further reduce any possibility of a data breach and Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) data loss.
- ✓ Enhance councillors' digital engagement.
- ✓ Enhance mobile working and flexible working capabilities and thereby work/ life balance
- ✓ Further reduce reliance (and the costs) of printed information.
- ✓ Councillor IT equipment standardisation will in turn enable officers council-wide to standardise the range services that we provide which will achieve efficiency savings for both councillors and officers.

Our strategy was to purchase high quality Microsoft Surface Go tablets during 2019 and at the beginning of 2020 for councillors to undertake their council-relate duties. With some councillors struggling with the tablet screen size we now additionally offer councillors: hubs connection hubs, full size keyboards, 24" screens, cabled mouse. This gives councillors a blend of home-based digital access with the mobility of being able to go mobile with their tablets when required.

As a result of COVID-19 and emerging understanding as to its longevity, officers evolve and became conversant with new face-to-face restrictive working arrangements and the use of virtual Microsoft Skype meetings become a key 'new working norm'. Likewise, it became apparent that virtual meeting MS Skype capabilities would need to be extended to councillors to enable them to perform their duties. This was not an intended original use of the previously purchased tablets.

We now have a pressing financial, technological and support need to migrate fully from Microsoft Skype to Microsoft Teams. Teams offers a range of additional meeting business functionality benefits over Skype but it is far more demanding in terms of computing processing power. As such, it is close to the limit and is very likely to become beyond the processing capabilities of councillor tablets as Microsoft invest in further enhancing Teams functionality.

With a view to giving councillors the very best experience possible during multi-party video conference calls, the decision has now been taken to allocate funding to quickly replace councillors' tablets with the same Lenovo laptops that officers use. These laptops are tried and tested, high specification devices that enable officers to perform the full range of council business demands.

In addition, and based upon approaches from several senior councillors, we recognise and acknowledge that providing them with a council tablet was unintentionally seen as an 'imposition' to some councillors, despite our best intentions. Likewise, we should have acknowledged councillors desire to be increasingly involved in their use of digital technology and how they work/ engage with council business.

With engagement firmly in mind but reflecting the need to standardise equipment across officers and councillors as far as is possible, councillors will be asked on an individual

basis whether they would benefit more from having a smaller, lighter more portable 13” council laptop, or a larger 15” laptop with a bigger screen and near full-size keyboard. Council provided ancillary devices – keyboards, screens, mice, hubs – will continue to be offered to councillors who’d like them and those who already have them will be able to connect and continue to use them plugged into the replacement laptops just as the tablets do.

With the Cabinet budgetary decision now taken, it is the intention to engage with councillors and roll-out new laptops during December and early January. Following a period of Microsoft Teams training virtual meetings we will all be migrating to Microsoft Teams around January 18th 2020.

6a. Members’ Tablets and ‘Laptops For Children’ Re-use

Once returned to the council, the tablets will be donated to the ‘Laptops For Children’ re-use programme to benefit local Tendring school children without access to IT.

Essex County Council have recently established an IT re-use scheme with the proceeds being converted into laptops for local school children. The scheme additionally protects the council with the data destruction certification that it needs to ensure the safety of our data.

Rather than ‘re-invent the wheel’ and cognisance to both resources and budget we have negotiated that, as a minimum, the reseller value of all of our Tendring tablets (plus some 50+ additional older laptops) will be converted through the ECC scheme into the standard Google Chrome laptop offering - specifically allocated to local Tendring school children.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Committee determines whether it has any comments or recommendations it wishes to put forward to the relevant Portfolio Holder or to Cabinet.

APPENDICES

N/A