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## **GOVERNANCE AND AUDIT COMMITTEE**

Date Written	9 <sup>th</sup> February 2024
Report Author	M Rivers
Service Area	Policy & Improvement
Exempt/Non Exempt	Non Exempt
Committee Date	26 <sup>th</sup> February 2024

*To: Chair, Ladies and Gentlemen*

# **ORGANISATIONAL RESPONSE TO AUDIT WALES DIGITAL REVIEW**

## **1.0 SUMMARY OF THE REPORT**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an update on progress and provide the Organisational Response Form in relation to the Digital Review carried out by Audit Wales
- 1.2 On 15<sup>th</sup> January 2024 Governance and Audit Committee received the Digital Review report from Audit Wales
- 1.3 This report provides the Council response in relation to the recommendation that was received.

## **2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS that**

- 2.1 Governance and Audit Committee note and debate the content of this report.

### **3.0 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 At Governance and Audit Committee on the 15<sup>th</sup> January Audit Wales presented their findings report regarding their Digital Review.
- 3.2 The recommendation from that report was *“The Council needs to develop its strategic approach to digital, to act in accordance with the sustainable development principle in the process of designing and delivering it, and to develop monitoring and evaluation arrangements for it.”*
- 3.3 The Council has reviewed the report and the recommendation and agree the outcome.
- 3.4 This report provides Governance and Audit Committee with the Council response to the recommendation in the form of an Organisational Response Form. The Organisational Response Form can be seen in appendix A.

### **4.0 WHERE WE WERE**

- 4.1 Audit Wales undertook the review to look at the Council’s strategic approach to digital. This review included interviews with Elected Members and Senior Officers
- 4.2 Audit Wales submitted the report to the Council on the 30<sup>th</sup> November 2023. This was report was presented to Governance and Audit Committee on the 15<sup>th</sup> January 2024
- 4.3 The Council agrees with the content of the report and the recommendation.
- 4.4 The Council has also reviewed feedback from Audit Wales as part of the Digital Strategy audit. In doing so we have carried out a desktop exercise looking at other Councils digital strategies and the Welsh Government strategy which sets out six themes, namely: Digital Services; Digital Inclusion; Digital Skills; Digital Economy; Digital Connectivity; Data and Collaboration. (Digital Strategy for Wales; Welsh Government; 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2021)

### **5.0 WHERE WE ARE NOW**

- 5.1 The Council has put in place an officer led working group to develop its digital and data strategy. This group is led by the Chief Executive and supported by officers from the IT section, Executive Support, Cyber Security and GDPR team. The membership of this team will be expanded as and when required against the needs of the delivery plan. The Council is in the design phase of the strategy
- 5.2 The Council has met with Audit Wales regarding the digital strategy report and recommendation as part of its regular meetings. Feedback has been used to develop the plan (from design to go-live). It is important that we have the right strategy for MTCBC that is effective and efficient and enables us to support our residents. However, we must be realistic, especially when considering available resources such as staff time and finance. Therefore, we are designing and developing the strategy in

line with the budget setting process. This means that we are considering phasing the delivery of strategy but also prioritising initiatives that are invest-to-save and/or that help our services become more efficient.

- 5.3 We are considering developing a digital and data strategy instead of two different strategies. This helps with integrating our approaches but also avoids confusion and potential duplication. This also allows us to build in our strengths around other areas such as GDPR to provide an all-round approach.
- 5.4 We are building robust governance around the strategy but using existing processes and arrangements where possible to ensure we are both effective but also efficient. This applies to the development but also following go live.
- 5.5 The Organisational Response Form has been completed and shared with Audit Wales. Audit Wales have accepted the details in the form.
- 5.6 The AAP has been updated to reflect the recommendation and the Council response. This will be monitored in line with the AAP monitoring process.
- 5.7 The Organisational Response Form is in Appendix A

## **6.0 WHERE WE WANT TO BE**

- 6.1 We want a strategy that is SMART (Specific; Measurable; Achievable; Realistic; timebound) and meets the needs of our stakeholders, especially our residents. As stated above, we want to ensure that we allocate the right level of funding and staffing to deliver this. This will mean we will have to prioritise initiatives.
- 6.2 A project plan will be developed to ensure that we meet the timescale set out, also this will ensure that any officer not included in the core working group can be communicated with early to inform them of the requirement of their skills to continue the progress of the plan.
- 6.3 Regular reports will be taken to the Corporate Wellbeing Board to ensure delivery and accountability. This can be supplemented by a sub-group that deals with lower level issues and delivery.

## **7.0 WHAT WE NEED TO DO NEXT**

- 7.1 Update on progress as per the reporting mechanism of the AAP System on a quarterly basis.
- 7.2 Continue to design and develop the strategy through our working group (expanding this group as required). This includes desktop exercises at first to better understand our current position.
- 7.3 Conduct targeted engagement with stakeholders as required

- 7.4 Focus on allocation of resources ensuring they are realistic. This will be done in line with our budget setting process.
- 7.5 Integration with other strategies/plans to avoid duplication and ensure we are all behind the strategy will be key

## 8.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)

- 8.1 There are no specific financial implications identified in this report. Any financial implications arising from the report will be reported to Cabinet/Council as appropriate, including potential options for funding.

**ELLIS COOPER**  
**CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

**COUNCILLOR ANDREW BARRY**  
**CABINET MEMBER FOR GOVERNANCE**  
**& RESOURCES**

<b>BACKGROUND PAPERS</b>		
<b>Title of Document(s)</b>	<b>Document(s) Date</b>	<b>Document Location</b>
<b>Does the report contain any issue that may impact the Council's Constitution?</b>		<b>No</b>

**Consultation has been undertaken with the Corporate Management Team in respect of each proposal(s) and recommendation(s) set out in this report.**

## Appendix 1 – Organisational Response Form.

### Organisational response

**Report title:** Digital Strategy Review – Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council

**Completion date:** 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2024

**Document reference:** TBD

Ref	Recommendation	<b>Organisational Response</b> Please set out here relevant commentary on the planned actions in response to the recommendations	<b>Completion date</b> Please set out by when the planned actions will be complete	<b>Responsible officer (title)</b>
R1	<b>The Council needs to develop its strategic approach to digital, to act in accordance with the sustainable development principle in the process of designing and delivering it, and to develop monitoring and evaluation arrangements for it.</b>	<p>To address this recommendation appropriately, MTCBC has developed separate sections (see below) to provide a robust response. As with all our strategic documents, we use the sustainable development principle. We have used the five ways of working as themes for our planning and response (see below).</p> <p>We will take a phased and SMART (Specific; Measurable; Achievable; Realistic; Time bound) approach to the development of the strategy, with each phase building on and being informed by the last. We have set up a working group (led by the Chief Executive) supported by officers from across relevant services. This will be widened as required.</p> <p>We will build on Recovery, Transformation and</p>		

Improvement (RTI) Plan for example the digital transformation work-stream. This strategy is the natural progression following delivery of the RTI Plan.

We will focus on the governance surrounding the strategy. This includes during the development and go live. It is envisaged that the delivery will report to the corporate wellbeing board with a sub-group dealing with day-to-day issues.

We will engage with scrutiny as a critical friend but also to include their role as public voice.

We will undertake desktop exercises to establish any feedback and where to target further engagement. In the design and development phases we want to understand current issues and if digital or data solutions can be put in place. We want to put clear success criteria in place to evaluate if the strategy is fit for purpose, answering the 'so what' question.

Key actions:

Set up working group and develop outline approach.

Engage with scrutiny for critical friend challenge of the approach and to gather public voice (this will supplement any previous or future public engagement).

Finalise phase 1 (design and development), this includes desktop exercises (especially regarding

December 2023

January 2024

June 2024

CEO & Project Support Officer

CEO & Project Support Officer

CEO & Working

public and service feedback) and data maturity exercise.

Use resource information as part of the budget setting process.

Undertake targeted engagement if required.

Set clear objectives to meet the need alongside themes/work-streams for delivery.

Develop and implement a matrix to prioritise initiatives.

Phase two - Strategy draft and testing.

Phase three – Strategy approval and launch (including governance arrangements).

Our plan to deliver the strategy will consider the following:

Involvement – We will involve stakeholders in the design and development of the strategy as required. This could take various forms depending on the need of the outcome. Our scrutiny members will have the opportunity to be critical friends but also input public voice.

April 2024

April 2024

July 2024

July 2024

September 2024

November 2024

Group Officers

Section 151 Officer

Communications Officer

CEO

Working Group Officers

CEO & Working Group Officers

Council, CEO and Working Group Officers

Integration – We will integrate the strategy with other key strategic documents, e.g. corporate wellbeing plan. Digital transformation forms part of the Councils self-assessment report.

Collaboration – We will work across the Council to design and develop a digital and data strategy that best meets the need. We will prioritise initiatives which will include how we can work together to get an effective, efficient and economic outcome. These could be invest-to-save opportunities, changes to meet new legislation, streamline processes, etc. The detail will be developed through the phases of the programme.

Prevention – We will align the strategy with Welsh Government strategies and utilise external funding where possible. This will prevent further stresses on our internal budget and prevent any duplication or misalignment with national strategies.

Long term – we will consider how the strategy can support the Council by including horizon scanning. This will help how the strategy supports the 15-year economic vision for example.