

JOINT SCRUTINY TASK GROUP FOR THE PARTNERSHIP

Joint Scrutiny of the draft Digital Strategy and ICT Roadmap

Final Report of the Task Group

Councillors ELDC: R. Jackson, R. Avison

Councillors BBC: J. Welbourn, T. Ashton

Councillors SHDC: P. Redgate, A. Beal, H. Bingham

Officers: James Gilbert (Assistant Director, Corporate) Suzanne Rolfe (Group Manager - Insights & Transformation), (Rebecca James (Scrutiny Officer)

Guest Witnesses: Jackie Wright (Head of ICT, PSPS Ltd.), Councillor Jim Astill (SHDC Portfolio Holder), Councillor Graham Marsh (ELDC Portfolio Holder), Councillor Paul Skinner (BBC Leader), Emily Spicer (Assistant Director, Wellbeing & Community Leadership), Lewis Ducket (Chief Executive, PSPS Ltd.).

Background and Introduction

The Task Group was asked to review the draft Partnership Digital Strategy and ICT Roadmap and provide recommendations to shape the final Strategy and Roadmap to be presented to Cabinet / Executive report. Key lines of enquiry were as below, and the full scope can be found at **Appendix B:**

- whether the strategy supports the delivery of the partnership business case;
- whether the priorities identified in the strategy feel right to members;
- alignment to other emerging partnership strategies.

The Group met twice and interviewed seven witnesses, asking them a number of questions regarding both the content and delivery of the draft Digital Strategy and ICT Roadmap.

The Group were advised that the development of the Strategy and Roadmap had been a one-year journey, with internal and external input, taking into account the current Digital/ICT strategies and roadmaps across the three Councils.

The final Digital Strategy and ICT Roadmap will be going to Cabinet and Executive meetings during March for consideration, with the report and recommendations from this Task Group being considered by Portfolio Holders for feeding into the final version.

Draft Digital Strategy and ICT Roadmap Summary

The Group received a presentation on the draft Strategy and ICT Roadmap which can be found at **Appendix C.**

ICT alignment was highlighted as one of the top priorities for the Partnership in the work programme agreed by the Councils. The draft Strategy covers 2023 – 2029, whilst the Roadmap is a foundational document created to support the strategy and therefore covers 2023 – 2026. The Roadmap recognises there are some initial pieces of work that are required

in the early years of the Strategy in order to lay the foundations for the Strategy's longer-term delivery.

The draft Strategy is about enabling the better use of technology and data to support the Partnership and the services provided to customers.

A key strand of early work, already funded and underway, is investment being delivered on the Assisted Self Service project identified in the roadmap, which will have a significant benefit to customers and the online experience they have with the Council

The delivery of the Strategy and Roadmap will provide a smoother, more personalised, more responsive service for residents, members, and staff alike. This will take time and require investment. Projects identified within the Roadmap will come forward with individual Business Cases for consideration, rather than the Councils being required to commit to an upfront investment.

The benefits of Partnership working (3 councils plus PSPS) will include greater value for money, with examples already from suppliers of small savings through joint contracting.

In terms of ways of working for Officers, it is about being joined up, seamless, the ability to access systems anywhere/anytime, plus the integration of back-office services with ICT as the facilitator.

The Strategy's delivery will be overseen by PSPS ICT and Digital Team, working closely with the Partnership Councils through the Assistant Director – Corporate.

Scrutiny Task Group Analysis and Discussion

System

The Councils have some legacy technology, mostly business applications, that are in the process of being removed. Where there is vulnerability, the ICT Team have extra firewalls and other systems in place to attempt to mitigate where possible.

The aim is to move to a single platform for residents – phone, digital, etc. – to build something once (rather than three times – once for each Council) that we can roll out across the 3 Councils in turn creating back-office efficiency and more capacity in PSPS.

Usability testing is not currently carried out with residents for online systems/forms. Individual service areas can decide to do this if they want to. Testing is usually done by people familiar with the technology or software they are trialling, which is seen as an area we can strengthen.

There is a software asset management programme, which is actively reviewed and seeks to identify underused software. This provides the means to look at removing programmes that are surplus to requirements. The ICT Team seek to review those systems that are within their control. Service areas are currently responsible for their own adherence to licensing regulations etc. for their systems. In future, the suggestion is for service areas to audit their business system usage to seek to identify underused software licenses

Users

Discussions around current challenges for members, staff and residents were summarised as follows:

- Response to residents – an automated system for responding is needed as we are currently not closing the loop with residents and letting them know the progress of issues, they raise with us. This can lead to repeat calls to chase things up - an automated response would free up time spent on answering repeated queries;
- Staff – the ability to collaborate is hampered by software integration across the Partnership;
- Need to encourage those who have the capability to use digital options to do so, thus freeing up time to assist those who cannot;
- There is a need to do the right thing for residents but also for officers. Members need to challenge projects that come forward to ensure they are improving the customer journey, and making it easier for staff to do their work;
- The Strategy and Roadmap are about getting the best outcomes for staff, Members, and residents. There is a need to drive as many savings in this area as possible through alignment of functions and software;
- The pandemic and lockdowns have digitally enabled people who never were beforehand. The demographic of those who can access things digitally has expanded, so it is good to be bold with what people can access online whilst still recognising the need to assist those who cannot access things digitally;
- Historically, there has been a tendency to have looked at services in silos and have demand led priorities: moving forward, a more holistic approach will benefit staff, Members, and residents;
- There is a lot of jargon in the documents, and it is not always clear whether some words are used in the normal sense or refer to particular external standards that are not referenced. Following discussion, an offer to add a glossary to the final version of the Strategy was made;
- In some areas, service alignment relies on shared technology being in place but aligning technology will take time due to existing contractual commitments;
- Strategies are good frameworks for how to work, but they need to be underpinned by proper action plans and embedding the culture of what the strategy says, so it is lived and breathed by all the staff;
- The same version of software and systems across the Partnership would allow more collaborative working and provide better resilience.

Oversight and Governance**Oversight**

There has been a lot of Portfolio Holder involvement along the way to ensure the Strategy and Roadmap were in a position to bring forward for scrutiny. The indication from Portfolio Holders was that the documents set out where we are, where we want to be, and how we get there. The Strategy fits with the Partnership business case, but having the Roadmap means the ability to flex to adapt to changes that may be needed, particularly as each Council is at a different stage in its ICT journey.

Governance

Future monitoring should be done through Scrutiny Panels, but also through Portfolio Holder meetings in terms of provision of figures, data, and updates. There will also be the need to get feedback from residents that their experience is improved.

The key issue is to ensure regular reporting and updates so Members and Officers know what is happening and when and what changes might be needed.

Recommendations

Following discussion, the task group made a number of recommendations for consideration by Portfolio Holders as the new Strategy continues to develop:

1. Every 2 years, the Digital Strategy and ICT Roadmap should be a Partnership scrutiny topic. In the interim year, the Partnership Annual Scrutiny Review, as part of its scope, should seek assurance the Strategy is making progress;
2. To use 'best practice' from ELDC in upskilling residents in terms of digital skills, with a view to rolling out a training programme to Boston and South Holland residents. As part of this model, to seek feedback from participants on digital service access and journeys;
3. There should be a continued focus on cyber security to ensure it is well embedded within the Partnership and that the importance of cyber security is understood by all;
4. To add a glossary to the Strategy and Roadmap to explain any terms considered technical.

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