

Report To:	CABINET	Date:	15th SEPTEMBER 2020
Heading:	DIGITAL SERVICES AND TRANSFORMATION PROGRAMME UPDATE		
Portfolio Holder:	COUNCILLOR JASON ZADRONZY, LEADER OF THE COUNCIL		
Ward/s:	ALL		
Key Decision:	YES		
Subject to Call-In:	YES		

Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to present to Cabinet an update on the key areas of progress of the Corporate Digital and Service Transformation (DST) programme.

Recommendation(s)

- **Note the progress of the current Digital and Service Transformation programme including the work to support residents through the Covid pandemic**

Reasons for Recommendation(s)

Digital transformation is focussed on changing the way we deliver services to provide enhanced customer service and in a more efficient and effective way. The expectation for digital service accessibility has been accentuated by the COVID 19 pandemic, which has required the Council to quickly implement improved means of enabling effective and accessible access for customers through self-serve and on-line rather than through face-to-face and telephone.

This report summarises key areas of progress made within the DST Programme, particularly in response to the Covid pandemic situation.

Alternative Options Considered

Not to press ahead with Digital Service Transformation: not recommended for the reasons below.

The rationale and business case for digital transformation is even more important than when reported to Cabinet in July 2019 due to the impact of COVID 19. The Coronavirus pandemic has

had a huge impact on the way people are living their day to day lives and has amplified just how important digital technology is. This requires the need for the Council to quickly change the way it provides services. The focus remains on significantly improving the customer experience and directly supporting the Medium Term Financial Strategy through financial efficiencies.

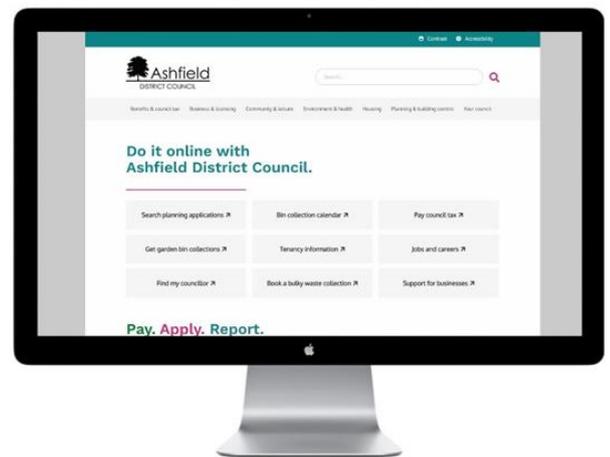
To cease or slow down the transformation programme will not deliver the Council's aspirations as detailed within the Corporate Plan especially Covid Recovery and Customer Experience through direct implementation of timely, high quality, effective and efficient services and projects.

Status Update on Progress

1. Key Project – Delivery of a New Website

The project to deliver a brand new Council website will be delivered in September, 2020. The new website will significantly improve:-

- Information and content which is designed according to customer needs and is task focussed, making navigation easier
- Design and layout - being modern, user friendly and attractive. Content and design will also be consistently laid out with clear branding.
- The user journeys – by prioritising the most common tasks and focussing on what the customer is seeking to do, thereby enabling customers to find what they are looking for more easily.
- Accessibility – not only will the website meet the minimum accessibility standards, required by 23rd September, 2020, full accessibility accreditation is also being sought.
- The customer's ability to self-serve on the website - reducing the need for the more costly telephone and face to face transactions.



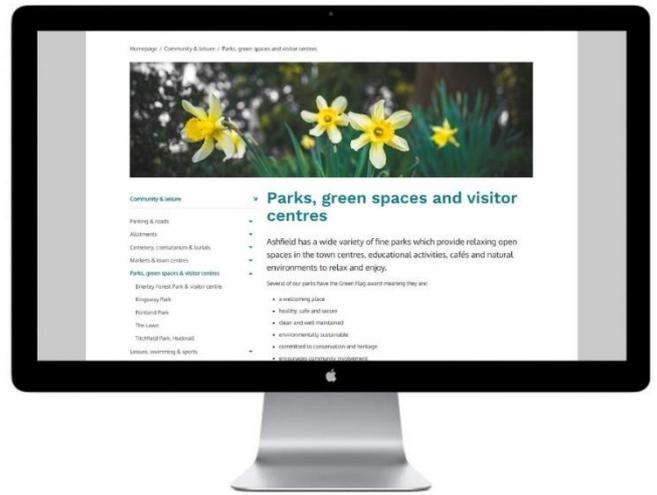
The content of the new website will present itself and work effectively on mobile devices, the most common device used by customers.

The focus for web channel improvement is aligned with our wider transformation programme, and is key to our ability to deliver channel shift and meet our Digital Transformation vision. The website will be the primary digital channel.

The ethos for content and experience is to develop digital services “so good that those that can, choose to use them”, and that we ensure we deliver “the right content, to the right user, at the right time”.

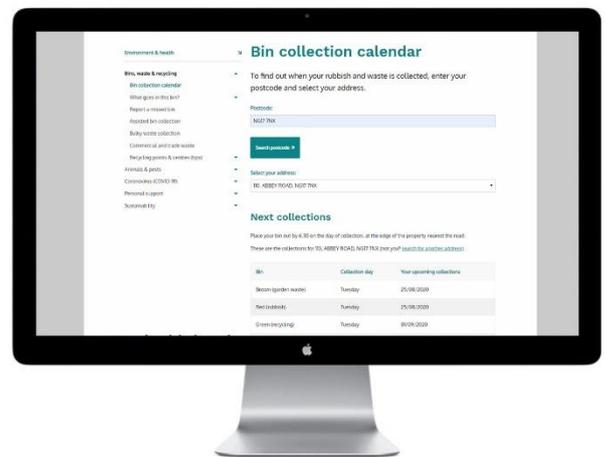
The new website will be:-

- User focused
- Relevant
- Trusted
- Accessible and inclusive
- Authentic
- Engaging
- Joined up



New digital features on the website that will improve the services provided to customers will include:

- Task oriented user journeys
- Improved information structure
- Rapid navigation designed to provide fast access to information
- Clear signposting and support into other third-party systems
- Ease of making an on-line payment
- An improved, simple to use ‘bin calendar’ which allows residents to search by postcode and be presented with their bin collection types over the next four week period.



These are the first in an accelerated programme of improvements to deliver an enhanced customer experience, more efficient internal processes and service improvements.

2. Key Successes – Digital Developments Supporting Customers During Covid

Key projects delivered by the Digital Transformation Programme have successfully supported continuing service delivery in the following ways:-

Online Forms

- Applications can now be made online for Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support, including the ability to provide evidence online too, reducing the need for applicants to visit our offices. Since 17th April, 2020 we have received 422 online benefits applications.
- We also have a Council Tax Empty Property Review form and Business Rates Small Business Rates Relief online form on our website. 1,769 business grants forms were received online, enabling the payment of a total value of £18.210m in business grants during the pandemic. This represents 98.13% of the businesses we believe are eligible for these grants.

- In total 209 discretionary business grants applications have been received via a form made available on the Council's website, enabling around £0.5m to be paid to businesses in need as at 21st August 2020. Further payments will be made before the end of September 2020.
- The application process for licensing houses in multiple occupation is now much easier through the development of self-serve online application forms. These forms can be quite lengthy, however, the new online form enables the applicant to save a part completed form and return later to complete fully, whilst also having the ability to submit the licence fee payment online. Applicant feedback so far has been very positive as the ability to self-serve online has streamlined and simplified the process. The online form has also reduced operational processing time considerably, enabling resources to be focussed on enforcement activity. 16 new applications and 3 variations have been submitted to date since April.

Easier Ways to Pay

- Several different payment channels have been introduced to enable customers to have greater flexibility and choice when making payments to the Council:-
 - The process to set up a direct debit for garden waste has been simplified through the launch of online direct debit set up.
 - Availability of an automated telephone payments line which incurs no call costs to the customer
- Improving accessibility for the customer through self-serve and on-line rather than through face-to-face and telephone is a key digital transformation objective, especially significant during the pandemic. There are now even more services that can be paid for through the Council's online e-store, with over 165 services now available. Since lockdown over 1,300 new customers have signed up for an e-store account, nearly 25,000 transactions have been made, enabling customers to pay over £3m for services during that period (end March to mid-August 2020).

3. Key Successes – Digital Developments Supporting Services During Covid

Support for Agile Working and Connectedness

- The use of Microsoft Office 365 was launched In April 2020, initially through the completion of mailbox migration and roll out of 'MS Teams'. The Teams solution has been key to enabling continuing connectivity of employees whilst working remotely. It is a unified communications and collaboration tool that combines workplace chat, video meetings, and file collaboration and storage.
- Changes to the way the housing repairs service is delivered were implemented in April 2020, incorporating the implementation of a new dynamic resource scheduling solution and a new agile working solution. This now enables front line operatives to receive work directly to a device, resulting in a more productive and agile re-structured housing repairs workforce, this increase in capacity has reduced reliance on sub-contractors at a premium cost.
- The primary link to the Council through our Wide Area Network (WAN) has been upgraded to double capacity, supporting improved agility, as it will enhance remote access into the

Council's systems, in terms of speed. A secondary line is now also being implemented which will ensure remote working is more robust, improving resilience.

4. Customer Centric Approach

The opportunity to review our customer service approach and function has been initiated through the Digital and Service Transformation Programme, through which we have an agreed vision and objectives:-

Customer Centric Vision

'We will take a 'one Council approach' to design and improve our services from a customer perspective, with input from customers and employees, to ensure our services in the future are accessible, easy to use and provide a good customer experience, continually improving standards informed by customer engagement'

Our customer centric aims are:-

- That staff in customer service centres should be able to resolve customer service enquiries where possible, not simply sign-post
- To reduce phone contact, but for those that need or want to talk to a person on the phone it should be simple
- To improve access to customer data which increases our understanding of the customer whilst being able to plan and effectively resource customer services.
- Understanding of all customer activity within a new customer services function will tell us what digital channels people are using, when they are using them, and how we are responding to that demand.
- An improved Customer Services function being the front door to the Council and the new website being the primary channel.

The Council will not go back to business as usual for face to face services as the pandemic restrictions ease, presenting an opportunity to change and improve, ensuring the customer centric aims are most effectively delivered.

Intended benefits of the creation of a new Customer Services function are:-

- Improved customer service - driven by customer needs.
- Consistent and measurable services.
- Greater satisfaction - less complaints.
- Reduced duplication in single access points.
- Efficiencies through digitisation of transactional services - channel shift and systems integration
- Focus of specialist resources to customers with more complex needs.
- Corporate business intelligence drives continuous improvement.

The new Service manager-Customer Services post has been created to lead the new function. The new role will:-

- Work collaboratively with service areas to transform the customer experience and re-design services around the customer.
- Lead the vision for customer service excellence across the Council - making it easy for customers to access services through all channels, encouraging and supporting self-service.
- Manage Customer Service Advisors in the new corporate customer service function creating an environment that is truly customer first.

- Report on all channels and performance, driving channel shift and improved customer experience, having corporate management and analysis of customer data to support services in service redesign
- Own the customer complaints process
- Manage the transition of new digital services into our operations – being the delivery element of transformational ‘design, build, RUN’

Recruitment to the new role will commence in September, 2020. The role will be responsible for building a core team of specialist, skilled Customer and Digital Advisers, being, as far as possible, a single point of contact for the Council.

5. Future Digital Transformation Developments

- Improvements to revenues and benefits online forms which will improve the customer experience as a result of the form being more intuitive to responses, pointing the applicant to only relevant sections of the form, whilst also enabling it to be easier for the applicant to submit evidence online with their application.
- Development of a new online Customer Hub will make it easier for customers to find information and safely interact with the Council, incorporating new intuitive, user-friendly self-serve features such as reporting missed bins. The customer will be able to self-serve 24/7 at a time most suitable to them, and be able to view updates of their requests or engagement with the Council.
- Improvements to the planning portal and solution will enable customers to submit applications digitally.
- A move to hosted telephony will improve the resilience of the Council’s telephone service whilst also enabling staff to make and answer calls from any work location, thereby improving customer access services.
- The new website content will continually be reviewed to align to customer demands, by prioritising the most common tasks and focussing on what the customer is seeking to do, thereby enabling customers to find what they are looking for more easily.
- Developing our data architecture to enable a single view of the customer, improving the customer experience when they interact with the Council.

Implications

Corporate Plan:

We are committed to putting customers at the heart of all we do, delivering high quality customer services across all functions to all local residents and businesses, across all access channels. This is reflected in our drive to provide responsive, high quality and continually improving standards of customer service, informed by customer engagement.

The Council’s Corporate Plan sets out a number of core values with the aim of making a real difference to people’s lives. Our intended digital transformation programme aligns with all of the new corporate values.

Legal:

There are no significant legal issues associated with the recommendations contained in this report. Legal issues will be identified in relation to each specific aspect of the programme and appropriate

advice will be given on an ongoing basis throughout the life of the programme. Any new systems or processes will need to be GDPR compliant.

Finance:

Budget Area	Implication
General Fund – Revenue Budget	There are no direct financial implications as a consequence of this report. Full Council in April 2020 approved £400,000 to be set aside for supporting resource and technical costs of the digital transformation programme. Actual spend is determined and approved on a case by case basis through appropriate level of decision, with general fund and HRA implications more specifically determined.
General Fund – Capital Programme	
Housing Revenue Account – Revenue Budget	
Housing Revenue Account – Capital Programme	

Risk:

Risk	Mitigation
Inability to meet customer needs and expectations. Customers are attempting to be more digital however we are not set up to respond.	Move towards customer centric ‘digital first’ approaches which provide convenient and accessible services in order to match customer expectations
Outdated technology landscape. Significant additional costs to replace out of date systems, in an ad-hoc, silo-based manner.	Joined-up transformation which is focussed on the customer, delivering value for money, and enabling a slimmer more efficient and productive organisation.

Human Resources:

We recognise that the digital and service transformation programme, along with required response to the COVID pandemic, has already resulted in new ways of working and the initial development of new skills for our employees. The change required will continue to be organic as we continually change the way we do things, our focus will be on making sure we have ‘the right tools for the right people at the right time’, both in respect of electronic devices but also timely and accurate information to enable people to work effectively.

Services impacted by the transformation programme and developing customer centric changes, will be involved in the review of the organisational model and specific service re-design. All reviews undertaken will be in line with Council policies and procedures.

Our aim is to facilitate more effective engagement across the workplace providing the opportunity for employees to become ambassadors of the digital transformation journey. We are currently refreshing our digital champion cross organisational working group, in alignment with the rollout of Office 365. We have continued to support our employees through the change, providing opportunity for upskilling, as we recognise that not all employees will find it an easy process.

Environmental/Sustainability

Digital transformation will have a positive impact on the environmental sustainability of the Council’s own operations and that of our customers, supporting sustained agile working across the organisation, which is already resulting in a substantial reduction in business mileage.

Equalities:

The intention of the Digital and Service Transformation programme is to enable the ability for the organisation to have an enhanced understanding and awareness of customer needs including those within the Protected Characteristics such as disability and age.

Our focus will also be to support our most vulnerable customers, particularly those for where digital channel shift may be difficult given individual circumstances, for example with low levels of literacy or digital skills.

Each individual element or project within the overarching programme considers a full detailed equalities impact assessment as part of service re-design in order to fully consider potential negative impacts and how we can mitigate or remove these. e.g. if we remove channel options such as face to face-consider how this would impact on vulnerable tenants.

Our new website will also be tested and accredited to website accessibility standards.

Other Implications:

(if applicable)

Reason(s) for Urgency

(if applicable)

Reason(s) for Exemption

(if applicable)

Background Papers

(if applicable)

Report Author and Contact Officer

Jo Froggatt – Assistant Director – Corporate Services and Transformation

01623 457328

j.froggatt@ashfield-dc.gov.uk