

Minutes of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee Meeting held on 9 April 2024

Present: Samantha Thompson (Chair)

Attendance	
Mike Davies	Bernard Peters
Gill Heath (Vice-Chair (Scrutiny))	Mike Worthington
Kath Perry, MBE	Nigel Yates
Jeremy Pert	

Also in attendance: Ian Parry and Alan White

Apologies: Tina Clements, John Francis and Bob Spencer

Part One

38. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest made at the meeting.

39. Minutes of the meeting held on 26 February 2024

Resolved: – That the minutes of the meeting held on 26 February 2024 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

40. Digital Innovation & Strategy Update

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources introduced the report which listed the progress made in developing the digital strategy for the county council.

The strategy had been designed to examine the benefits of digital development via Artificial Intelligence (AI), Robotic Process Automation (RPA) Virtual Reality (VR) and Large Language Models (LLM) amongst others. The report covered why the council would want to use it; the benefits and how success could be measured.

A short presentation was provided for the members, followed by a discussion.

The main issues discussed at the meeting were:

- The strategy covered a 5 year timeline, up to 2029.
- Six strategic pillars had been identified to help deliver the strategy. These were listed in the report as; Digital Champions; Digital

Council; Digital Place; Digital Inclusion; Digital Data; Digital Pipeline.

- The analysis on current projects showed that the council are predominantly stage 1 and 2 in terms of 'digital maturity'. The aim was to develop to stage 3.
- It was felt that there was a need for a customer facing website that could interact in the same way as a face to face conversation. For example chat bot's.
- It was important that there was connectivity between services so that customers could be redirected to other services.
- There needed to be a move away from silo working.
- The aim is to develop the way we connect with residents as an authority and for it to be improved (where possible) through technology.
- It was acknowledged that some areas of the community would need more support and time to adapt.
- Integration with current working strands, such as Adult Social Care was important.
- Working with partners would improve the customers experience and reduce duplication.
- The risk of personal data being shared or lost was highlighted as an area which was being taken very seriously and work was being done to constantly reevaluate security.
- The strategy would be considered by Cabinet on 7 July. As the strategy progresses and develops, more reports would come to Scrutiny for consideration.
- Assurance was given that there was an understanding that some people struggled with technology and would be supported where possible but the likelihood is there may always be some that either won't want to or have the skills to engage.
- It was envisaged that a number of other strategy's such as the Community Strategy and the Customer Strategy would all connect together to support as many residents as possible, particularly those who need extra help.
- Some services already offered support and guidance such as Libraries.

Resolved:

- a. That the Digital Innovation Programme update, and progress report be received.
- b) That the Committees feedback on connectivity and customers being supported be reported to the Cabinet on 7 July.
- c) That the Committee add the strategy to the work programme so that updates are received during the strategy's development.

41. Customer Experience Strategy update

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources introduced the report which examined the relationship the council had with the public and its pledge to “encourage and listen to the community, partners and business, working together to improve our county”.

The Council aimed to achieve the Institute of Customer Services ‘ServiceMark’ accreditation which was a national standard, recognising an organisation’s commitment to customer service and its aim to achieve high standards as part of a long-term embedded customer strategy.

The ServiceMark accreditation was awarded based on both customer satisfaction and employee engagement, helping organisation understand the effectiveness of its customer service strategy from multiple touchpoints and identify areas for improvement.

The report detailed the work undertaken so far and the challenges involved. The three pillars within the strategy were; Strategy and Leadership; Culture and engaged people; and Operational delivery. Each service would have their own report but when combined, the whole organisation would be able identify specific issues/themes.

A short presentation was provided for the members, followed by a discussion. In addition to the information in the report, the following was provided and issues raised:

- Information from the Institute of Customer Services and learnings from others had been used to develop the strategy but was tailored towards Staffordshire.
- The council was a complex organisation with differing customer needs.
- It was acknowledged that it was difficult to measure the customers experience when everyone wants a different thing.
- Earning customer trust and ensuring residents, councillors and employees were advocates for the council in the widest sense was important.
- Many elements had fed into the development of the strategy.
- The way the council gather information and fill some of the gaps in collecting information was challenging particularly from certain groups of customers, e.g. rural communities.
- ServiceMark was an opportunity for organisations of all sizes to demonstrate the high quality of their customer service both internally and externally.
- The initial survey which would provide a starting point, had been distributed to customers in March and employees in April 2024. The same dates would be used again in 2025 which should show the direction we are traveling in. If the assessment showed progress, official assessment could be in July 2025 with possible ‘ServiceMark’

by the end of 2025.

- Culture would form part of the questioning/assessment. It was felt that this should include partners or contractors who carry out work on the councils behalf.
- It was suggested that Overview and Scrutiny should be added to the governance structure. It was noted that this would be considered when more detail was available.
- If any specific areas of concern were raised, experts would be consulted to provide advice.
- It was acknowledged that as a multi service organisation, satisfaction could not be guaranteed on every occasion.
- The term 'resident' was felt to be more appropriate than customer as sometimes there is little choice over service provider.
- National benchmarking and collaborative working were worthwhile but sometimes a specific issue needed to be addressed separately. When the assessment had been completed, there would be more knowledge of whether collaborations would be useful. Data was already being shared with other authorities where there was a shared customer.
- Key Performance Indicators (KPI's) if used on a digital platform could show trends which could be used for further and continuous improvement.
- Sub-contractors such as Amey had used the survey tool and the feedback had been fed into the transformation programme.

Resolved:

- a) That the update on the development of the Customer Experience Strategy be noted.
- b) That the Strategy be added to the work programme for further scrutiny at a time most beneficial.

42. Cabinet's response to MTFs Working Group report

The Committee considered the Executives response to the recommendations made in their working groups report agreed by this committee in January 2024.

The Cabinet member informed the committee that there would be a new style Integrated performance report in the first quarter of 2024/25 which would contain more detail and performance indicators focussing on the corporate priorities. Detail was available in the report which also contained a link to the Cabinet and its full report.

Resolved: That the Executive response be noted.

43. Climate Change Working Group report on Carbon Sequestration and Woodland creation - Cabinets response

The Committee considered the Executives response to the recommendations made in their working groups report agreed by this committee in January 2024.

The Leader of the Council presented the response and explained that recommendation 3 had not been accepted as the MTFS was set around a number of strategies, one of which was the capital programme. Recommendation 1 had partially been accepted. Detail was available in the report which also contained a link to the Cabinet and its full report.

It was suggested that land in areas of Staffordshire Moorlands which struggled to feed animals or grow crops could be used for tree planting.

Resolved: That the Executive response be noted

44. Work Programme

The Committee was reminded that next meeting of the committee would be the 18 June 2024.

Since the last meeting an informal meeting of the Committee had taken place to discuss the Community Strategy. A copy of the notes taken at the meeting had been attached to the work programme for information.

Resolved: That the Work Programme be noted.

Chair