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Portfolio	Resources & Transformation
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Public/Private Document	Public

## Draft Digital Experience Strategy

### Executive Summary

1. This report provides an update to Members on the progress that has been made in developing a digital strategy for the borough.

It sets out the process that we have been though up to now and presents the draft digital experience strategy which is now ready to share and engage with key stakeholder groups on.

The report also sets out the next steps which are proposed to finalise the strategy and to develop a delivery plan which will sit behind the strategy.

### Recommendation

2. Members of Overview and Scrutiny are asked to note the report.

### Reason for Recommendation

3. To provide Members with an update on the progress that has been made to develop a digital strategy for the borough.

### Key Points for Consideration

4. Work to develop a digital strategy for the borough began in 2019 and was supported by an independent external consultant who develop the first draft of the strategy.

In January 2020 an internal engagement session was held on the initial draft strategy. This session was attended by colleagues from the Council, CCG, Action Together and GMCA and was a really successful and positive session where we:

- a. discussed digital achievements to date;
- b. explored the alignment of the digital strategy to with other priorities and programmes across the borough and wider across GM;

- c. asked for feedback on the proposed digital priorities; and
- d. discussed how we could best work together to ensure that once a strategy was in place, that it can be successfully delivered.

The plan was to take the feedback from the session and use that to finalise the strategy, however following the Covid outbreak in March 2020, the work to finalise the digital strategy was put on hold and work to progress and finalise the strategy has only recently restarted.

This report together with the attached draft strategy, provides an overview of the steps we have taken since December 2020 to revisit and finalise the strategy and the proposed next steps to get the strategy approved and develop a clear delivery plan for it.

## 5. **Developing the Digital Strategy**

In December a small working group was established to work together on finalising the digital strategy for the borough. This group included representatives from policy, transformation and reform, economy, neighbourhoods and Action Together.

As detailed above we already had a draft strategy and a wealth of feedback on it from the engagement session, so this was the starting point.

It was then important to consider the significant changes in how people and organisations have used digital technology and services in the last year due to Covid and ensure that we factor in and build upon the advancements in the use and demand for digital in developing an aspirational strategy for the borough.

In addition, in February 2020 Greater Manchester Combined Authority approved a GM digital blueprint which sets out priorities and plans and ambitions for GM to be recognised as a world leading digital city region. GM have also coordinated work to develop and deliver a Covid 19 digital action plan and to establish a GM digital inclusion taskforce.

It has been important to both engage in this wider GM work and ensure that the strategy aligns to the GM priorities as appropriate.

In order to develop our priorities and outcomes, we have tried to access relevant data and intelligence to help us understand both the strengths and challenges facing our residents and businesses in accessing and using digital technology. However, it soon became clear that local data and intelligence is limited. This is not just an issue for Rochdale, but one that most areas are facing and it presents a real challenge as we seek to address digital exclusion.

Therefore the priorities have been developed based on an understanding of the issues and challenges faced nationally and across GM, together with local anecdotal evidence that we have gathered through various community engagement sessions we have had in the last year.

To address this gap going forwards, we are working with a number of other Council's across the county to develop a toolkit which will enable councils to create a baseline of who in the borough is experiencing digital exclusion, where they are, what their barriers are to accessing services and social contact online, and the interventions that would most effectively support them to become more digitally engaged. This action will form

part of our delivery plan, and we will use the findings of this to refresh and update the digital strategy in summer 2022, 12 months following final approval.

Work has also been undertaken to gather in examples of achievements we have already made and aligning these to the priority areas. We have tried to incorporate achievements, not just of work that has been delivered or led by the council, but achievements from our partners too, and we will continue to add to these as we further engage with partners on this strategy and delivery plan.

## 6. Digital Experience Strategy Overview

The digital experience strategy has been aligned to the Council's corporate plan and our ambitions for our people and place. Either thematic priority areas have been identified under 'digital people' and 'digital places' as shown in the table below:

<b>Digital People</b>	<b>Digital Places</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Digital Inclusion</li><li>• Digital Skills</li><li>• Digital Healthcare</li><li>• Digital Interaction</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Digital Infrastructure</li><li>• Digital Security</li><li>• Digital Public Services</li><li>• Digital Employment and Business</li></ul>

The strategy documents sets out what we have achieved so far for each of these priority areas as well as the future outcomes we aim to deliver against. It is ambitious and far reaching, covering not only how we want to transform how the Council and CCG utilities new digital technology to deliver better and more efficient services, but it also aims to enable and develop digital skills, digital infrastructure, digital healthcare, and digital employment and business across the borough to ensure our communities and businesses can take advantage of the benefits that can be delivered through fast and secure digital infrastructure and technology.

We want everyone to have a positive digital experience. The Council is committed to creating a digital infrastructure that will provide fast and responsive public services across our borough, keep communities connected and promote digital security. We aim to improve the digital skills of our citizens, increase digital awareness and digital access and support businesses and employment in the digital sector. The Covid-19 pandemic has led to a surge in the use of digital technologies and has created potential for new ways of work and life. We will build on those opportunities, improving our place and people's lives through digital transformation.

## 7. Next steps

The draft digital experience strategy is being presented to a number of different meetings during March in order to raise awareness, request feedback and support and to encourage engagement in the development of the delivery plan.

Also during March, an equality impact assessment will be developed for the new digital experience strategy to ensure that we consider the impact on protected and vulnerable groups in terms of adverse impact, discrimination, addressing health inequalities and

health disparities. This will also be kept under review and revisited as the delivery plan is developed.

The look of strategy document will also be reviewed, the current layout just being a draft as the content is finalised. As a public facing document which sets out high aspirations for the borough the strategy will require a high quality, professional and accessible design which will spark interest and excite all stakeholder groups and ages with the potential that the strategy can deliver for the borough.

Once the strategy has been to Cabinet the next step will be to establish a system wide digital experience steering group which will be tasked with developing a delivery plan which will sit behind the strategy. This will involve capturing existing and identifying new projects which will deliver the outcomes in the strategy. It will also incorporate a specific and separate digital inclusion plan.

The delivery plan will incorporate activity from a range of partner organisations across the borough and beyond, as this strategy cannot be achieved through could activity alone. It will be need to be delivered in partnership to be successful. As part of this we will engage with and seek senior level system wide support from the strategic place board.

It is hoped that this work to develop the delivery plan and make any final changes to the strategy can be completed in approximately three months, and that they can be presented to Cabinet for approval in July 2021.

Once in place the role of the steering group will be to oversee, support and provide constructive challenge in the delivery of the strategy and projects within the delivery plan.

There will be costs in delivering the digital strategy and plan and equally the projects will generate savings and wider benefits. As these become clear, they will also be presented to the steering group in the first instance, and then escalated to the most appropriate place as required.

Finally, it will be important to raise awareness and promote the digital engagement strategy both internally and externally through an initial launch and then an ongoing communications campaign that will be developed which while recognising the Council's leadership role, will be a system wide campaign which all partners and stakeholders can engage with.

## 8. **Alternatives Considered:**

The draft digital strategy does show that we can already point to achievements in all of the thematic areas proposed, therefore an alternative could be to continue as we are, but without a strategy.

This option has been discounted as it is considered that by setting a clear vision, priorities and outcomes that we want to achieve, a strategy will help us to better focus our resources and prioritise work in the areas that most need to be addressed. In addition it will provide a clear narrative for us to be able to engage and collectively work with our partners and communities.

## Costs and Budget Summary

9. As detailed in the report it is likely that there will be costs associated with the delivery of this strategy, however until the deliver plan is developed we cannot give an indication of what these might be or how they will be funded.

Any actions or projects which are included in the delivery plan, will require a business case which will set out any financial implications, together with any savings or wider benefits which are expected to be achieved

## Risk and Policy Implications

10. The digital strategy aligns to the Council's corporate plan priorities of people and place and has taken into consideration the Greater Manchester Digital Blueprint and digital inclusion work.

There are clear risks of not having a digital strategy and a clear plan for how we are going to address issues like the digital divide and also lead to missed opportunities such as attracting digital businesses to the borough if we don't have a clear and targeted plan to improve the boroughs infrastructure, connectivity and skills.

These risks and more will be considered as part of work to carry out an equality impact assessment which is taking place this month.

## Consultation

11. Consultation on the initial draft strategy was carried out with a wide range of stakeholders in January 2020. Over the next month the draft strategy is being presented to a range of internal meetings to start to engage a range of stakeholders in finalising the strategy and to encourage them to engage in the development of the delivery plan which will take place over the next few months.

A draft engagement plan has been also been developed. It aims to use a cooperative engagement approach which will help us to inform, involve and collaborate with our communities as we finalise the plan and develop the delivery plan.

Background Papers	Place of Inspection
12. There are no background papers to this report.	N/A

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