

**REPORT TO:** CORPORATE, RESOURCE MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE  
**SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**DATE:** 27<sup>th</sup> February 2024

**REPORT OF:** CABINET MEMBER FOR FINANCE AND RESOURCES

**REPORT TITLE:** RADICALLY DIGITAL STOCKPORT STRATEGY UPDATE

## 1. SUMMARY / MATTER FOR CONSIDERATION

- 1.1 This report provides an update on our award winning Radically Digital Stockport programme 2022-25<sup>i</sup>, restating our ambitions, key deliverables of the last 12 months and priorities for the year ahead. It also shows the programmes positioning as a key enabler in relation to the Borough Plan and Council Plan.

Fig 1: Shows Radically Digital Stockport as part of Council Plan 2024-2027<sup>ii</sup>



## **2. RECAP ON DIGITAL JOURNEY**

- 2.1 We started our digital journey with our Digital by Design programme. Launched in 2015, a phase one investment of £7m secured the development of key digital priorities, including: a new user focussed website and building or procuring new reusable technical capabilities (such as a booking system, case management system and online form development). Developing a new data warehouse enhanced our ability to better join up the data and insight we hold as a Council<sup>iii</sup>.
- 2.2 Digital by Design Phase 2 commenced in 2018 with a focus on maximising the opportunities of the capabilities developed so far to transform services using reusable service patterns to drive consistency and efficiency<sup>iv</sup>. A focus on a 2:1 investment proposition supported transformation in Children and Corporate Support Services – including review of fostering services and revs and bens amongst others . This was accompanied by the launch of DigiKnow, Stockport’s Digital Inclusion Alliance – aimed at ensuring no-one got left behind and the signing of the Local Digital Declaration, a public pledge along with hundreds of other councils to meet high standards for our technology and digital services and adopt digital culture and ways of working<sup>v</sup>.
- 2.3 For the period between early 2020 and the launch of Radically Digital Stockport in 2022 digital resources were directed to responding to the pandemic. We were able to use our digital capabilities, skills and working practices to develop new digital services and products at speed. This included creating new services to support both residents and businesses by providing efficient access to vital support grants, organising and tracking Covid case management, monitoring personal protective equipment (PPE) stocks and blending multiple datasets to help support those residents who were clinically extremely vulnerable<sup>vi</sup>.

## **3. STRATEGY UPDATE**

- 3.1 In March 2022 we shared our Radically Digital Stockport Digital Strategy<sup>vii</sup>. The strategy set out an ambitious programme of work to be delivered by March 2025. This phase of the programme has a focus on Data, Automation, and Strategic Digital Partnerships .
- 3.2 The Digital Strategy is structured into three key pillars: Digital Communities, Digital Place and Digital Council. These pillars still reflect the programmes position as a key enabler to not only deliver efficient and effective services, but also our four big ambitions, our other enabling programmes (Workforce, Working with Others and Delivering change and spend wisely) and our cross-cutting themes (Fair and Inclusive Stockport and Climate Action).

*Fig.2: Radically Digital Stockport framework*



3.3 An overview of each of the pillars, achievements over the last 12 months and ambitions for 2024/25 have been described below.

3.3.1 **Digital Communities** recognises that whilst digital technologies enable us to implement new, innovative and accessible services to residents - we also need to ensure that no-one gets left behind and that people have the skills, confidence and capabilities to make the most of the opportunities of a digital age. It's about providing the necessary information, in the right place, at the right time and in the right format, to make informed decisions and prevent escalation. It's delivering technology enabled living, using the assets available to increase independence.

Digital Communities key deliverables in last 12 months:

- The opening of the first Sky Up Digital Hub in Greater Manchester, in Stockport, thanks to the collaboration between DigiKnow partners (our digital inclusion alliance in Stockport), Sky, Age UK Stockport and Stockport Council<sup>viii</sup>
- Starting Point Community Learning Partnership, our main partner in the DigiKnow network, receiving a half million lottery fund grant to establish a digital champion training hub in Stockport
- Delivery of over 100 events during Digifest, a festival to support digital innovation and culture, a programme part of Stockport's year as Town of Culture
- The partnership has helped over 50,000 individuals get online or improve their digital confidence
- Enhancing resident experience through the first of a series of iterative improvements to stockport.gov.uk with an emphasis on accessibility and usability to the platform that had over 13 million page views in 2023<sup>ix</sup>.

Digital Communities ambitions for 2024/25:

- We will continue to work with our Digiknow partners to increase the number of Digital Champion volunteers in all of our communities and tackle digital exclusion. We will seek to secure sustainable funding for Digital Inclusion initiatives. We will embed Digital in health and wellbeing by working with key VCFSE organisations (e.g. Age UK, Disability Stockport, Pure Innovations) on available digital tools.
- We will continue our focus on improving resident experience by reviewing pathways into services both online and via the phone. We will complete the redesign of our stockport.gov.uk website and a new online directory of support that provides comprehensive information in one place. We will expand our online portals to enable residents to track progress and reduce administration. We will also take this opportunity to reduce the number of websites we have, understanding the impact these have on the climate.
- We will support people to live independently for longer through our Tech Enabled Living programme. Technology solutions will enable us to deliver personalised, cost-effective health, care, and support. Our “Virtual House” product will provide an interactive tour showing examples of occupational therapy, assistive technology and sensory aids, equipment and solutions that will enable residents to live independently for longer.

3.3.2 **Digital Place** is about ensuring we are building the right infrastructure, skills and networks to help nurture a resilient, thriving and green local economy. It’s providing the framework to support our Stockport Climate Action Now ambitions, using digital to monitor and lower carbon emissions. It’s about making the most of the technology and data to create an interconnected, smart town improving the lives for people in Stockport and ensuring that we continue to be a hub for entrepreneurialism in a digital age.

Digital Place’s key deliverables in last 12 months:

- The opening of the Merseyway Innovation Centre (supported by £1.4m of UK Shared Prosperity Fund monies) office space developed to encourage the growing sector of digital, creative and innovative businesses looking to locate in Stockport and offers flexible accommodation for businesses<sup>x</sup>.
- Council engagement in the development of a new £350m investment in a new data centre located in Stockport. The data centre will be the largest in the North of England and will support the borough’s Digital economy and our ambition for Stockport to be a Digital hub for businesses.
- The successful installation of hundreds of kilometres of high-speed low-latency fibre cables across the region to over 140 sites. Known as the Local Full Fibre Network (LFFN) which will provide a cutting-edge

network-enabling services to be proved more efficiently, securely, and flexibly. It will also create the foundation for future smart place initiatives<sup>xi</sup>.

Digital Place's ambitions for 2024/25:

- We will complete a 10 week deep-dive into Digital Place initiatives for Town Centre West MDC development
- We will continue support the proposals for the new data centre that is to be launched in 2025, understanding the strategic opportunities this brings in positioning Stockport and Greater Manchester as alternative to London as a Digital and AI hub.
- We will ensure Digital is a part to the borough's Skills Plan, a post-16 plan to make sure education and training provision is aligned to providing the right skills, qualifications and talent pipeline for businesses. We will also understand how to best measure digital skills of the borough's workforce.
- We will deliver Stockport's GMAOne Network (delivered via the LFFN fibre). We will leverage our GMAOne network infrastructure to deliver 5G advanced wireless/digital infrastructure to deliver smart energy, smart transport systems and a more resilient, connected, accessible and sustainable place for everyone

3.3.3 We know that ever developing new technologies, as well as changes to how people interact, mean we need to ensure we have the right foundations and skills as a **Digital Council**. This pillar recognises that being radically digital is also a mind set and a way of operating. It isn't about doing the same things better and faster, it's grasping the opportunities to transform how we operate such as embedding more digital and agile practice to support greater collaboration, innovation and human centred design<sup>xii</sup>. This must sit upon a solid and robust technical architecture that enables digital transformation at pace. As well as having a secure and trusted data foundation, managing and connecting our data to generate insight will enable us to transform our services.

Digital Council's key deliverables in the last 12 months:

- We have successfully completed a number of complex system changes and system migrations to support services in the delivery of efficient and effective services (for example Bereavement Services, Waste Management, Registrars, Council Tax, Legal Services).
- We have supported the council's ambitious Medium Term Financial plan by utilising our Digital capabilities to streamline processes around Taxi Licensing, Verges and Trees and Bulky Waste.
- We have continued to utilise the suite of Office 365 capabilities to automate or streamline business processes. For example the Members Enquiry Tracker, Starters Movers and Leavers, Corporate Calendar and automation of support tickets for previous applications developed.

- We have used data and our other digital solutions to reduce delays in transferring patients to social care in a project sponsored by Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities (DLUHC)<sup>xiii</sup>.
- We have successfully supported colleagues through a number of learning opportunities from those looking for certification and accreditation in Digital skills (For example: Digital Apprenticeships, Kanban Project Management Certification, Business Analysis Certification, Data Skills Academy). To those also learning new basic digital skills to support them in their roles (For example: Office 365 training, Agile Fundamentals, Word, PowerPoint and Excel for beginners).

Our ambitions for the Digital Council pillar in 2024/25

- We will continue to maximise the opportunities of the Microsoft Office 365 suite to improve businesses processes around PDRs, Scanning documents and the processing of invoices and payments.
- We will continue to evolve our digital offer, using agile working practices and digital tools to improve our processes and user experience. We will deliver our data strategy to ensure that we use and share more of our data to improve planning and decision making and increase the interconnectivity of systems to improve services and collaborative working.
- We will define what Artificial Intelligence (AI) means for Stockport and complete a readiness assessment for services. We will develop an AI policy in line with the ethics of AI to ensure this is used appropriately. We will identify opportunities to test AI and predictive analytics to support the delivery of efficient and effective services.
- We will review the decisions we have made over the last 9 years, for example our approach to in-house development, ensuring we make the right decisions about the products we continue to invest in for the future. We know that technology has evolved enormously since our initial investment in 2015, the emergence of AI and Robotic Process Automation and their benefits emphasises the needs for our products and capabilities to continue to evolve to support our Council plan ambitions.

#### **4. CONTINUING TO ENSURE OUR STRATEGY IS INCLUSIVE, ROBUST AND AMBITIOUS**

- 4.1 We want to challenge ourselves to be the best understanding where we can and should go further; and, also where we need to adopt a different approach. We ensure we are making the right technical decisions by aligning ourselves closely to Government Digital Services and other Greater Manchester authorities, maximising the opportunities of collaboration and shared learning,
- 4.2 We welcome ‘check and challenge’ to ensure our Strategy is inclusive, robust and reflects the ambitions of our borough.. We will continue to ensure that we

engage with our partners, local people, the VCSFE sector, Elected Members, the Economic Alliance, Education settings and other key stakeholders

## 5. RECOMMENDATIONS AND NEXT STEPS

- 5.1 We continue to work with colleagues and partners in the delivery of the Radical Digital Stockport strategy and the delivery of priorities within it, with ongoing review and alignment back to the Council Plan ambitions.
- 5.2 We will ensure that we measure our success through setting ourselves ambitious targets and tracking these in our Portfolio Performance and Resource Agreements. A further update on progress will be presented back to scrutiny later in November 2024 to allow for progress to be made on our ambitions for 2024.

## BACKGROUND PAPERS

There are none

Anyone wishing to inspect the above background papers or requiring further information should contact Holly Rae, Gill Lawton or Adrian Davies on [holly.rae@stockport.gov.uk/](mailto:holly.rae@stockport.gov.uk) [gill.lawton@stockport.gov.uk/](mailto:gill.lawton@stockport.gov.uk) [Adrian.davies@stockport.gov.uk](mailto:Adrian.davies@stockport.gov.uk)

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<sup>i</sup> Link to MJ Award win <https://www.digitalstockport.info/what-the-lgc-digital-impact-award-means-to-us/>

<sup>ii</sup> Council Plan draft shared with scrutiny

<https://democracy.stockport.gov.uk/documents/s198439/Stockport%20Council%20Plan%20202223%20-%20Draft%20for%20CRMG.pdf>

<sup>iii</sup> Scrutiny report on DbD Phase 1:

<https://democracy.stockport.gov.uk/documents/s109217/170124%20DbD%20update%20to%20CRMG%20003.pdf>

<sup>iv</sup> Scrutiny reports on DbD Phase 2: <https://democracy.stockport.gov.uk/ielssueDetails.aspx?IId=65278&Opt=3>

<sup>v</sup> Published updates on the Local Digital Declaration <https://www.digitalstockport.info/why-we-signed-the-local-digital-declaration/> ; <https://www.digitalstockport.info/how-weve-responded-to-the-local-digital-declaration/>

<sup>vi</sup> Update on digital support during the pandemic: <https://www.digitalstockport.info/how-is-digital-helping-stockport-during-coronavirus/>

<sup>vii</sup> Scrutiny update on Digital Strategy <https://democracy.stockport.gov.uk/documents/s198441/2022-01-18%20CRMG%20Scrutiny%20-%20Radically%20Digital%20Stockport%20-%20v3.pdf>

<sup>viii</sup> Sky and Age UK digital hub update <https://www.stockport.gov.uk/news/sky-partners-with-age-uk-stockport-and-stockport-council-to-open-hub>

<sup>ix</sup> Website update <https://www.digitalstockport.info/updating-our-website-new-brand-better-performance-and-a-lot-of-tlc/>

<sup>x</sup> Merseyway Innovation hub <https://www.stockport.gov.uk/news/exciting-new-innovation-centre-opening-in-the-heart-of-stockport>

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<sup>xi</sup> GM One Network <https://www.digitalstockport.info/stockport-council-took-part-in-the-greater-manchester-local-full-fibre-network-project-heres-what-happened/> , <https://www.ukauthority.com/articles/greater-manchester-launches-partnership-for-gm-one-network/>

<sup>xii</sup> Agile working <https://www.digitalstockport.info/creating-a-culture-of-agility-at-stockport-council/> ; <https://www.digitalstockport.info/changing-hearts-and-minds/> ; <https://www.digitalstockport.info/our-digital-transformation/> ;

<sup>xiii</sup> Update on data solution <https://www.digitalstockport.info/towards-a-digital-solution-to-reduce-delays-in-transferring-patients-to-social-care/>