

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

**DATE:** 4<sup>th</sup> March 2025

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

**REPORT TITLE:** RADICALLY DIGITAL STOCKPORT: 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>, with 2025 signifying the end of our existing strategy and therefore an opportunity reflect and to set out our ambitions for the next 5 years, restating the programmes importance as a key enabler to Stockport's big ambitions and delivering the priorities of the Borough Plan and Council Plan.
- 1.2 It will also provide an update on Artificial Intelligence (AI) addressing our approach, principles and priorities.

## 2. DIGITAL STRATEGY: LOCAL, REGIONAL AND NATIONAL CONTEXT

- 2.1 Nationally, the context for digital transformation is evolving rapidly, driven by the need to improve public services, increase productivity and foster inclusive growth. This has been accelerated further by the sequence of recent announcements from the Prime Minister in the AI Action Plan<sup>ii</sup>, the State of Government Review<sup>iii</sup> and the AI Growth Zones plan<sup>iv</sup>.
- 2.2 The Greater Manchester (GM) Digital Blueprint<sup>v</sup> and the ongoing momentum from the recent completion of some of its key priorities, such as the GMOne Network (a world class digital infrastructure providing high speed internet and data across the region), has seen Greater Manchester become a leading digital city-region for innovation. This work present huge opportunity for all of GM, including Stockport.
- 2.3 Stockport's digital journey started back in 2015 with the Digital By Design programme. A phase one included a new user focussed website and building or procuring new reusable technical capabilities (such as a booking system, case management system, data warehouse and online form builder).
- 2.4 This year signifies a decade of digital transformation and the end of existing strategy and therefore the perfect opportunity to reflect on the brilliant work we have done and our learnings during this time. Stockport is still in a strong position because we have continuously evolved with the advancements in

technology. However, the market is changing and we need to review the decisions we made 10 years ago, that have served us well, but might not be right for the future. Our aim now is to take stock and understand the next evolution our digital platform needs, to keep pace with our growing ambitions.

### 3. PROGRESSING OUR DIGITAL STRATEGY

3.1 The current Digital Strategy, launched in 2022 is structured into three key pillars: Digital Communities, Digital Place and Digital Council.

*Fig. 1: Radically Digital Stockport framework*



3.2 An update is provided below against the three key strands of our Digital Strategy:

3.3 **Digital Communities** recognised 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.

Update on the key deliverables we shared with you for Digital Communities;

- We have continued to work with our Digiknow partners to increase the number of Digital Champion volunteers (456) helping over 70,000 residents in our local communities to tackle digital exclusion. We delivered over 40 digital events delivered during 'Digitober-2024' and DigiFest February 24. We have also supported Stockport Race Equality Partnership to achieved 5-year connectivity for 'The Space' on Petersgate in partnership with Cisco/One Network & GMCA to encourage ethnically diverse and migrant communities to be supported to 'get online' in a safe space.

- We maintained our focus on improving resident experience by improving pathways into services both online and via the phone, with a focus on SEND, Adult Social Care, Family Hubs and Start Well. We completed our redesign of our stockport.gov.uk website and delivered a new cross partner One Stockport community directory of support that provides comprehensive information in one place. We have also been able to reduce the number of websites we manage and reduce the amount of out of date content on the websites we have, reducing the impact we have on the climate and making it easier for people to find information.
- We delivered our “Virtual House” product which provides 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. We have also been able to support the delivery of our One Stockport Local appointments, with a view to making online booking of appointments available in the future.

**3.3.1 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.

Update on the key deliverables we shared with you for Digital Place;

- We completed our 10 week deep-dive into Digital Place initiatives for Town Centre West MDC development, this identified future use cases to explore as part of our Smart Places initiatives and next phase of our digital strategy.
- We continue to support the plans for the new data centre that is to be launched later this year, leveraging the strategic opportunities this brings in positioning Stockport and Greater Manchester as alternative to London as a Digital and AI hub.
- Digital formed 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 have successfully delivered Stockport's GMA Network (delivered via the LFFN fibre<sup>vi</sup>) with Virgin Media Business to deliver fibre optic connectivity to more than 1,500 public service sites partnering Bury, Bolton, Oldham, Rochdale, Trafford, Salford, Manchester and Wigan. We will now leverage our GMA 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.

**3.3.2 Digital Council** acknowledged 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>vii</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.

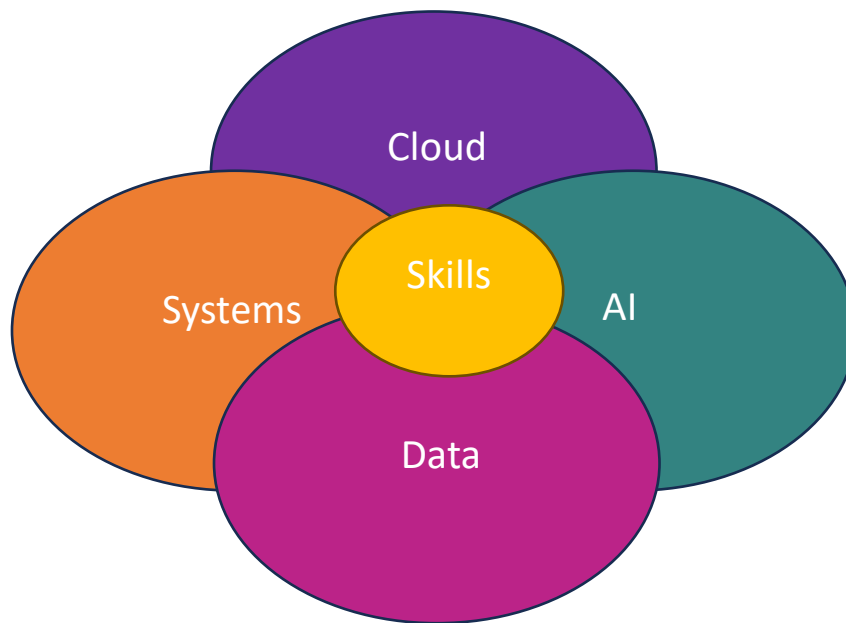
Update on the key deliverables we shared with you for Digital Council;

- We have been able to release new applications that maximise the capabilities of our Microsoft Office 365 suite, improve business processes around PDRs, scanning documents and the processing of invoices and payments.
- We have delivered our Neighbourhood Data profiles <sup>viii</sup>, putting good quality data at the fingertips of our community to be used to improve outcomes for residents.
- We are currently reviewing the decisions we have made over the last 10 years, for example how our data and systems are hosted, ensuring we make the right decisions about the approaches we invest in to ensure we can leverage the benefits of technology in the future.
- We are also defining what the approach we take with AI in Stockport with a number of proof of concepts, more detail on these is shared later in this report.

## **4. REFRESHING OUR DIGITAL STRATEGY**

- 4.1 Over the coming months we will update each pillar of our digital strategy to ensure the workstream and their deliverables reflect our priorities. Our initial focus is on Digital Council, this pillar lays the technical foundations for the organisation to be able to leverage the benefits of technology across our workforce, driving the delivery of efficient and effective service for our residents.
- 4.2 The emerging workstreams of the Digital Council pillar are; Cloud hosting, Systems, Data, AI and Skills. All these workstreams are inherently interconnected and cannot be successful if completed in isolation of one another.

*Fig 2: Shows the interconnectivity of the workstreams of the Digital Council pillar.*



- 4.3 The **Cloud hosting** workstream is about where our systems and data live and are accessed from. Our systems and data currently live in a data centre we host ourselves in Stopford House car park. Systems can now be hosted over the internet known as Cloud hosting. Our ambition is to move all appropriate systems to the cloud by 2032, a key year in relation to the refresh of the hardware of our data centre. This ambition has been driven by industry best practice with regard to hosting systems and data in the cloud and the benefits an organisation can begin to leverage such as AI, Infrastructure scaling and security.
- 4.4 The **Systems** workstream is about our Council systems, we have lots of different systems that are critical to the delivery of council services, as an example our different service case managements systems, systems that take payments or those that store data on our assets etc. This workstream is key to supporting our ambitions to be cloud hosted by 2032 and will need the strategic alignments of systems contracts with internal resources for system migrations to take place before this date. This workstream has further ambitions to resolve issues with legacy systems and to lead conversations across the region in improving the relationship between councils and system suppliers.
- 4.5 **Artificial intelligence**, plus specifically the emergence of Generative AI and the exciting opportunities it brings to help deliver our ambition of efficient and effective services for residents, means this has now been developed into a workstream in its own right. We will look to leverage the opportunities the technology brings, ensuring inclusion and ethics are at the heart of every decision we make. See Section 4 for more detail on our approach, principles and priorities.

- 4.6 **Data** is one of our greatest assets as an organisation and our ambition is to improve the quality of data and make it widely accessible (in a secure way) for services, residents and communities to be able to maximise the impact it has on informing decisions and improving outcomes for residents. Our existing data architecture was developed back in 2017, which supported the then strategy to host all our systems internally. As mentioned, the landscape and best practice is evolving and therefore we are reflecting on the decisions we made to ensure they are fit for the future.
- 4.7 **Skills**, the digital skills we need at home and work are continuously evolving. Our ambition is to reskill the organisation, including colleagues, councillors and our technical experts, to be able to leverage the benefits of new technologies in work and at home ensuring everyone can thrive in a digital age. Having the right skills and confidence will be critical to the success of our boroughs ambitions.

## 5. ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

- 5.1 AI is a terminology in computer science that has been around for decades but it has recently been thrust into the spotlight due to the emergence of Generative AI.
- 5.2 Generative AI has the ability to learn and be asked to create new things that would in the past needed human intelligence to create or solve. This technology has accelerated the AI market, increasing the accessibility to products that are simpler to use. The technology is prompted using natural language meaning it's at our fingertips to learn and use.
- 5.3 The use of AI doesn't come without its risks and therefore we need to balance pace, ambition, caution and risk. To mitigate risk, we have created a clear governance structure and AI policy with decisions on its use taken by our Digital Board (chaired by the Executive Director for Corporate and Support Services) and regular reports to the Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources.
- 5.4 In our approach to AI we have developed the following principles;
- We solve problems once, where we can.
  - We are problem focussed and product agnostic
  - We ensure AI decisions are transparent and explainable.
  - We ensure clear accountability for AI decisions.
  - We ensure that AI is used ethically and in ways that benefit the community.

5.5 We are currently in a phase of discovery and investigation, we are supporting services to experiment with AI and we are trialling its introduction with a number of proof of concept's, with a view to using our learnings to inform a longer-term approach that is more strategic and organisation wide. Our approach is supported by the recent AI Action plan released by the Prime Minister that sets out governments ambitions to transform public services using AI<sup>ix</sup>.

#### 5.6 Proof of Concept 1 – Productivity - Copilot in Microsoft 365

5.6.1 Copilot is Microsoft's AI tool that acts as a virtual assistant to streamline administration tasks and drive productivity. Copilot is built into Microsoft tools such as Teams, Outlook, Excel, PowerPoint, Word and Edge. The technology is prompted by natural language to be complete tasks normally undertaken by a human. This doesn't replace the need for the human in the process but the technology acts like an assistant to support the colleague in their work activity.

5.6.2 As part of our investigation we currently have 50 copilot licences distributed across the organisation, our areas of focus are Business Support, Corporate Affairs, Internal Audit, Legal, Policy, Planning and HR. These are all areas in high demand and have lots of administration tasks such as Minute taking, document briefings, data analysis or report writing.

5.6.3 We also have a further investigation into the technologies ability to support people with Neurodiversity such as ADHS or dyslexia. Early feedback suggests that the software has already dramatically supported colleagues to be able to concentrate in meetings and then in completing their work tasks as the assistant is there to support them each step of the way.

5.6.4 The trial will run until May and aims to test the tools ability to reduce time in a number of tasks whilst still maintaining or improving quality of service. We will update you on its results once this concludes in the summer.

#### 5.7 Proof of Concept 2 – Social Care Note Taking – Magic Notes

5.7.1 Magic Notes is a specialist tool for caseworkers to record sessions and instantly create detailed assessments. The tool was created by Beam to reduce manual typing up of Adult Social Care Workers assessment conversation notes, improve the recording of notes and deliver better support in a timely way. The tool is an application that lives on the Social workers device, laptop or mobile, and is switched on and off to record the assessment that is taking place.

5.7.2 The proof of concept concluded in January 2025 and investigated the tools value in assisting administration of the Care Act Assessment and the

Occupational Therapy Basic Assessment, consisting of 20 Social Workers and lasted 6 weeks. The trial aimed to test time saved, quality of service and quality of data collected.

- 5.7.3 Feedback suggest that Magic Notes was able to reduce the time taken per assessment by 52%. Practitioners also noted a significant improvement in the quality of the conversation during an assessment as they could focus on the resident and not taking notes, this feedback was confirmed by the resident. Practitioners also shared that the quality of the note taking improved with the ability to cite direct quotes from the resident.
- 5.7.4 This successful trial of Magic Notes in Adult Social Care has led to further investigations taking place in both widening the scope of the tool in this service and introducing the tool to similar tasks undertaken in Childrens Social Care. We will keep you informed on the developments on this tool and its use in future updates.
- 5.8 Our investigations into AI to date have told us the following: There are lots of exciting opportunities that this technology can bring if delivered in the right way; The market is moving fast and products developed now will be replaced with ones better and cheaper within in 6 – 12 months'; We need to invest in the skills required to be able to leverage the benefits of this technology; To deliver at pace it is likely we will need the skills and expertise of a delivery partner.

## **6. RECOMMENDATIONS AND NEXT STEPS**

- 6.1 Scrutiny committee members are asked to comment on the progress, direction of travel and next steps outlined within the report.
- 6.2 We will run a series of member briefing sessions on a range of digital topics, including Cyber Security, Data (State of the borough and neighbourhood profiles), Artificial Intelligence, Office 365 capabilities and the DigiKnow alliance.

## **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> Prime Ministers AI Action Plan [Prime Minister sets out blueprint to turbocharge AI - GOV.UK](#)
- <sup>iii</sup> State of Digital Government Review [State of digital government review - GOV.UK](#)
- <sup>iv</sup> AI Growth Zones plan [Government fires starting gun on AI Growth Zones to turbocharge Plan for Change - GOV.UK](#)
- <sup>v</sup> Greater Manchester Digital Blueprint <https://www.greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/media/7953/gm-digital-blueprint-2023-26-final.pdf>
- <sup>vi</sup> Local Full Fibre Network Programme [Greater Manchester commits to world-class digital infrastructure securing the biggest government full-fibre investment in the UK - Greater Manchester Combined Authority](#)
- <sup>vii</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>viii</sup> Neighbourhood Data profiles [Stockport Neighbourhood Profiles | Tableau Public](#)
- <sup>ix</sup> Prime Ministers AI Action Plan [Prime Minister sets out blueprint to turbocharge AI - GOV.UK](#)