



Report

Report to:	Risk and Audit Scrutiny Committee
Date of Meeting:	15 September 2021
Report by:	Executive Director (Finance and Corporate Resources)

Subject:	Audit Scotland Report - Digital Progress in Local Government
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1. Purpose of Report

1.1. The purpose of the report is to:-

- ♦ provide the Risk and Audit Scrutiny Committee with a summary of the information contained within the Audit Scotland Report 'Digital Progress in Local Government' published in January 2021

2. Recommendation(s)

2.1. The Committee is asked to approve the following recommendation(s): -

- (1) that the key messages and recommendations are noted.

3. Background

- 3.1. The use of digital technologies is becoming increasingly commonplace in all aspects of our lives, including personal, social and in the workplace.
- 3.2. Digitally enabled business processes can enable organisations to deliver both improved services and efficiencies. One example is using online Council webforms to access information, make a request, or book or pay for a service. This can be more convenient for citizens (website is available 24x7) and is cheaper than other methods of delivering the service, such as phone or face-to-face.
- 3.3. Over the past year digital technologies have enabled councils to continue to deliver services during the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, accelerated rollout of laptops and Office 365/Microsoft Teams has enabled thousands of staff to work effectively from home, virtual committee meetings have allowed democratic processes to continue, and citizen interaction in many cases has transferred to channels such as email, on-line forms, phone, and videoconferencing.
- 3.4. The pandemic has also highlighted the disadvantages that many citizens experience through digital exclusion, where they cannot access, or benefit from, on-line services. Reasons for exclusion include poor internet availability, affordability, lack of skills, or concern around on-line security. South Lanarkshire Council (SLC) Digital Inclusion Strategy has a programme of work to address these challenges in SLC.

- 3.5. SLC has a digital strategy which sets out how the Council will utilise technology to deliver service and cost benefits. This strategy is currently being refreshed and will be submitted to committee for approval. This will align closely with the Council Plan Connect, and also with the new Scottish Government national digital strategy published in spring 2021.
- 3.6. Audit Scotland published a report in January 2021 – “Digital Progress in Local Government” which looked at how well councils are progressing with putting in the building blocks required for digital transformation. To assess this progress and provide examples of best practice Audit Scotland interviewed representatives from several councils (not including SLC), COSLA, the Local Government Digital Office, Scotland Excel and SEEMIS

4. Key messages

Key Message 1: Impact of COVID-19

- 4.1. Councils are at different stages in digital transformation, with those furthest along better able to minimise the impact of COVID-19 on delivery of Council services. Adoption of digital solutions has been accelerated by necessity and councils should maintain momentum to continue to transform services to benefit their citizens.

Key Message 2: Becoming a Digital Council

- 4.2. Clear vision and leadership, with workforce and community engagement, are essential to realise the benefits of digital transformation. Delivering change needs a culture of collaboration and innovation to succeed.

Key Message 3: Citizens at the Heart

- 4.3. There has been a lack of citizen involvement in digital service design, and inadequate monitoring of outcomes, by local government

Key Message 4: Workforce and Skills

- 4.4. Insufficient staff capacity and lack of digital skills are the most significant barriers to progress in digital transformation.

Key Message 5: Data and Technology

- 4.5. Councils are making some progress in exploiting data to improve decision making (for example data-matching to award grants), however, more work is required to both develop data standards and to eliminate legacy systems.

Key Message 6: National Leadership and Collaboration

- 4.6. There needs to be greater leadership and clarity of roles at a national level. Refresh of the national digital strategy provides an opportunity to set a shared vision and agree shared priorities.
- 4.7. The report contains several **recommendations** which are listed below, together with an assessment of the position in South Lanarkshire Council:-

Audit Scotland recommendation	SLC position and action required, if any.
<p>Key Message 1: Impact of COVID-19 To maintain momentum (post -COVID), councils should assess their progress, learn lessons, and identify and address barriers and inequalities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As part of post-COVID recovery SLC are modernising business processes, for example in regard to agile working. • SLC Digital Inclusion Strategy, which was approved in 2020, is currently being implemented to address barriers and inequalities. • Action: Lessons learned from pandemic to be incorporated into new SLC Digital Strategy, which is currently under development.
<p>Key Message 2: Becoming a Digital Council</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Councils should have a clear digital vision and strategy that sets out how digital transformation will deliver better outcomes for people. The strategy should be supported by plans detailing actions, timescales and the required investment in technology, people and skills. • Councils should have a structured approach to collaboration and innovation, with staff given space and time to learn, test new ideas and put them into practice. Councils should actively collaborate through the Digital Office and other regional partnerships. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SLC are currently refreshing its Digital Strategy, this will include all the elements described in Audit Scotland recommendation (action plans, etc) • Action: Complete development of new SLC Digital Strategy, actively engaging with external partners to ensure that best practices in strategy development and implementation are followed
<p>Key Message 3: Citizens at the Heart</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To better understand the needs of citizens, councils should have a citizen and community engagement plan and ensure they have sufficient staff with the skills to carry out service design. • Councils need to improve how they monitor outcomes. This could include adopting a benefits realisation approach. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SLC has a range of processes in place to engage with citizens, these can be leveraged to gather inputs for digital programmes which impact council services • Action: Ensure that citizens are consulted as part of the development of new SLC Digital Strategy • Action: Consider formally adopting the “Scottish approach to Service Design” which is being promoted across the public sector by the Scottish Government. This would provide staff with a formal process to redesign services and deliver digital transformation. Training is available via the Local Government Digital Office • Action: Include details of how the outcomes of digital programmes will be monitored in new SLC Digital Strategy

<p>Key Message 4: Workforce and Skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Councils should conduct a staff skills survey to better understand what digital and data skills they need. Councils should have detailed workforce and skills development plans, including for leadership teams and elected members, that align with digital transformation plans. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SLC have conducted staff surveys during pandemic to assess immediate needs. This work can be built upon to identify future digital skills requirements. • Action: SLC should perform a survey to assess current digital skills and training requirements to deliver the new SLC Digital Strategy and achieve the required outcomes
<p>Key Message 5: Data and Technology</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Councils should understand their technology infrastructure and have a clear plan to address legacy systems to create better coordinated solutions. This could include common platforms and shared procurement. • Councils should work with the Digital Office and Scottish Government in developing common data standards and a data ethics approach. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As part of the Council's Asset Management Planning, SLC IT have an ongoing programme of systems upgrades and refreshes to provide better IT capabilities and services across to the Council and to citizens. However, there are several legacy systems which will require to be replaced to enable future progress in digital transformation • Action: Include plan for legacy system replacement in new SLC Digital Strategy • SLC currently work very closely in many areas with both the Digital Office and Scottish Government, including on data standardisation / data ethics. No specific further action required here
<p>Key Message 6: National Leadership and Collaboration</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The refresh of the digital strategy for Scotland provides an opportunity for all organisations which support the delivery of digital transformation in local government to set the vision and agree shared priorities. These organisations, including the Digital Office, the Improvement Service and councils, should: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • agree on and clearly articulate their roles and responsibilities • identify where a shared approach would add value to developing and delivering common systems and platforms, and specialist skills • review the funding and delivery model for the Digital Office, to ensure it has the capacity and support to deliver on the agreed priorities • streamline a work programme for the Digital Office, with each part of the programme having senior-level sponsorship. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SLC is fully engaged with Digital Office, including via SOLACE and SOCITM (Society of IT Managers). • Action: Continue to participate in national bodies to set the vision and agree shared priorities as described in the recommendation

5. Employee Implications

- 5.1. There are no direct employee implications.

6. Financial Implications

- 6.1. There are no direct financial implications.

7. Climate Change, Sustainability and Environmental Implications

- 7.1. There are no direct climate change, sustainability, or environmental implications.

8. Other Implications

- 8.1. Considering the detail of the report and identifying actions as appropriate contribute towards effective risk management.

9. Equality Impact Assessment and Consultation Arrangements

- 9.1. This report does not introduce a new policy, function or strategy or recommend a change to an existing policy, function or strategy and, therefore, no impact assessment is required.
- 9.2. There is no requirement for consultation on the content of the report.

Paul Manning

Executive Director (Finance and Corporate Resources)

30 August 2021

Link(s) to Council Objective

- All Council objectives

Previous References

- None

List of Background Papers

- Link to SLC Digital ICT Strategy 2017-2020
[Delivering a digital council Plans and policies - South Lanarkshire Council](#)
- Link to SLC Digital Inclusion Strategy 2020-2023
[Digital Inclusion Strategy 2020 - 2023 Plans and policies - South Lanarkshire Council](#)
- Link to Audit Scotland report on “Digital Progress in Local Government”
[Digital progress in local government | Audit Scotland \(audit-scotland.gov.uk\)](#)

Contact for Further Information

If you would like to inspect the background papers or want further information, please contact:-

Brian Teaz, Head of IT Services

Ext: 5648 (Tel: 01698 455648)

E-mail: brian.teaz@southlanarkshire.gov.uk