REPORT TO EXECUTIVE

Date of Meeting: 1 April 2025

Report of: Strategic Director, People and Communities

Title: Update on the Digital Customer Strategy

Is this a Key Decision?

No

Is this an Executive or Council Function?

Executive

1. What is the report about?

1.1 The Digital Customer Strategy was adopted by the council in December 2023, this report provides an update on progress to date. Delivering the strategy is vital for delivering members aspirations for customer-focused services, emphasising the importance of a culture of excellent customer and digital service, digital equality, and efficient processes.

2. Recommendations:

2.1 The report is noted by Executive.

3. Reasons for the recommendation:

3.1 This report is for information to give members a progress report on a previously adopted strategy.

4. What are the resource implications including non financial resources

4.1 There are no specific resource implications to note as the strategy is being delivered within existing resources identified through the annual budget setting process.

5. Section 151 Officer comments:

5.1 The funding required has been approved by Council either via the Capital Programme or the Strata Business Plan.

6. What are the legal aspects?

6.1 This report is for information purposes only. There are no legal issues to bring to the attention of Members.

7. Monitoring Officer's comments:

7.1 Members of Executive will note that this report is for information purposes only. The Executive is not required to make a decision, but to note the content of the report.

8. Report details:

8.1 The Digital Customer Strategy update report in Appendix A and the Action Plan in Appendix B outlines the progress on delivering on the key aims and objectives of the strategy.

The strategy was adopted by the council in December 2023, its aim is to improve user experience and ensure customer/residents needs guide service development and delivery. The strategy emphasises a culture of excellent customer and digital service, digital equality, and efficient processes.

Prior to the adoption of the strategy, significant groundwork was laid, including the rollout of Microsoft 365 to all staff, reduction of mailbox sizes, creation of a SharePoint site for council members, and commissioning audits into digital equality and data use. The strategy sets out ten goals covering all elements of digital customer service, with detailed outcomes and priority actions listed for each goal.

The strategy was developed with input from various stakeholders and a public consultation, which included an online survey and outreach to ensure broad participation. Red Quadrant was engaged to assess the council's customer experience maturity and data maturity and have provided recommendations for enhancing customer intelligence, addressing digital exclusion and the data strategy that will be considered by Executive in April.

Since the adoption of the strategy, several key achievements have been made, which are detailed in the attached report., these including the creation of dedicated Customer and Digital Teams, adoption of the Strata Business Plan which has 10 bespoke enabler projects which will contribute to the success of the strategy, and the launch of MyExeter our digital front door to council services.

The action plan appended to this report sets out the approach being taken to ensure delivery of the council's commitment to enhancing customer service through digital transformation. This report and action plan shows the council is on track to achieve the goals outlined in the strategy. Ongoing efforts to address digital inequality, promote digital collaboration, and build digital knowledge and skills will ensure that the strategy continues to deliver positive outcomes for residents and staff alike.

9. How does the decision contribute to the Council's Corporate Plan?

9.1 The Council's corporate plan is the Council's overarching strategy, setting out the council's vision and ambitions for Exeter and the outcomes it wants to achieve for both the city and the council. The Digital Customer Service Strategy is vital for the council's role in leading a well-run council and delivering customer-focused services.

10. What risks are there and how can they be reduced?

10.1 There are significant risk to the successful achievement of the outcomes attached to the ten strategic goals. These could be themed as reputational, leadership, culture, skills, capacity and financial resources. As the delivery plan is implemented change projects will have risk assessments and mitigation plans built in.

11. Equality Act 2010 (The Act)

11.1 Under the Act's Public Sector Equalities Duty, decision makers are required to consider the need to:

- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other prohibited conduct;
- advance equality by encouraging participation, removing disadvantage, taking account of disabilities and meeting people's needs; and
- foster good relations between people by tackling prejudice and promoting understanding.

11.2 In order to comply with the general duty authorities must assess the impact on equality of decisions, policies and practices. These duties do not prevent the authority from reducing services where necessary, but they offer a way of developing proposals that consider the impacts on all members of the community.

11.3 In making decisions the authority must take into account the potential impact of that decision in relation to age, disability, race/ethnicity (includes Gypsies and Travellers), sex and gender, gender identity, religion and belief, sexual orientation, pregnant women and new and breastfeeding mothers, marriage and civil partnership status in coming to a decision.

11.4 In recommending this proposal no potential impact has been identified on people with protected characteristics as determined by the Act because: because the report is for information only.

12. Carbon Footprint (Environmental) Implications:

12.1 There are no direct carbon/environmental impacts arising from the recommendations.

13. Are there any other options?

13.1 If the Council had not adopted the strategy in December 2023, it could have considered maintaining the status quo with most services offering limited variety of channels and continuing to rely on traditional (old fashioned) delivery methods and incremental shifts to digitisation. The Council could have continued to develop services from an organisational perspective and not make the shift to customer "centric" thinking. However, this would create an increasingly inefficient, costly and ineffective experience for customers and staff. This would also be contrary to all expectations of a modern local authority as set out in The Outcomes Framework for Improving and Supporting Local Government Digitalisation published by the Local Government Association (LGA) in July 2022.

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Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1972 (as amended)

Background papers used in compiling this report: -

Digital Customer Strategy and Strata Business Plan

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