

Audit Scotland Report – Digital Progress in Local Government

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 The Audit Scotland report is aimed primarily at elected members and concludes with a checklist intended to help elected members scrutinise and challenge digital progress. The checklist is included at appendix 3.

1.2 The report:

- sets out the key characteristics of a digital council
- looks at how well councils are putting in place the building blocks required for digital transformation
- examines what opportunities exist and what barriers to progress there are
- provides examples that demonstrate how some councils are transforming
- examines how councils have used digital technology to respond to the Covid 19 pandemic and what can be learned from this.

Recommendations:

1.3 It is recommended that Audit and Scrutiny Committee:

- i. Note the content of the Audit Scotland Report
- ii. Note the progress made by the Council towards becoming a Digital First Council;
- iii. Consider and comment on the current position of the Council in respect of the areas of priority highlighted in the report

Audit Scotland Report – Digital Progress in Local Government

2.0 INTRODUCTION

2.1 The Accounts Commission audit report “Digital Progress in Local Government” in Scotland was published earlier this year. The audit commenced prior to the Covid-19 pandemic and was originally intended to document good practice in digital transformation in local government, and describe what it takes to become a digital council. It was then adapted to look at how councils responded to the digital challenges of the pandemic and how councils and their partners had to innovate and collaborate on a scale never seen before. The findings are based on case study work carried out at six councils and the full report is included as appendix 2 to this document.

2.2 The Audit Scotland report is aimed primarily at elected members and concludes with a checklist intended to help elected members scrutinise and challenge digital progress in their Councils. The checklist is included at appendix 3. The report:

- sets out the key characteristics of a digital council
- looks at how well councils are putting in place the building blocks required for digital transformation
- examines what opportunities exist and what barriers to progress there are
- provides examples that demonstrate how some councils are transforming
- examines how councils have used digital technology to respond to the Covid-19 pandemic and what can be learned from this.

2.3 The Council approved a new ICT and Digital Strategy for 2021-24 in January. Many of the recommendations from the audit report have already been included in our development plans as we progress with our already well-established path to becoming a Digital First council. The audit report recognises that all councils operate in a complex and challenging environment and that all are at different

stages of digital transformation. The report is designed to offer advice to all councils, no matter where they are on that journey. The messages in the audit report should be considered alongside our Council's preparedness and response to the pandemic. Because of our digital preparations and well established ways of working remotely, council staff successfully transitioned from office to home workers almost overnight when lockdown occurred and have continued to work remotely whilst continuing to deliver a first class service to those most in need.

- 2.4 Some of the report's key messages further strengthen the case for increased investment in digital services and call for effective governance arrangements to be developed to include:
- a committee or board with a remit to scrutinise digital programmes
 - a digital delivery/programme board with overall strategic control
 - an operational board or corporate groups to monitor delivery of specific digital programmes, which may be at service level or have cross-council membership.

This summary report references those key messages and includes a brief outline of the council's progress against each finding and recommendation.

3.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 It is recommended that Audit and Scrutiny Committee:
- i. Note the content of the Audit Scotland Report;
 - ii. Note the progress made by the Council towards becoming a Digital First Council;
 - iii. Consider and comment on the current position of the Council in respect of the areas of priority highlighted in the report.

4.0 DETAIL

- 4.1 Six councils were originally selected for the audit in mid-2019, each at different starting positions and each contributed case study material, participated in interviews, workshops and reviews of key documents. Other organisations such as the Digital Office and Improvement Service also contributed alongside members of the national Digital Partnership Board. Audit Scotland originally set out to examine "what progress councils are making in becoming digital councils that improve services and deliver better outcomes for citizens". In March 2020 the focus of the audit changed to include a review of the digital response to the pandemic and how organisations have had to innovate and collaborate on a scale never seen before.
- 4.2 The audit is based around six key characteristics that Audit Scotland expect to find in a digital council. These are focused on delivering better outcomes for its

citizens through the best use of people and digital technology. The report places great emphasis on having the right skills and culture in place and explores further each of the following characteristics:

- **Digital Leadership:** Communicates a clear digital vision and ambition and creates an innovative and collaborative culture that drives change. Understands the potential of people and digital technologies to transform services for citizens.
- **User focused:** Understands the needs of citizens, communities and staff affected by services and policies, and involves them in service design. Focuses on improving outcomes for citizens and other users.
- **Digital Workforce:** Has the skills, knowledge and confidence to develop new ways of working, including using new technology.
- **Collaborative:** Develops new ways of working together, sharing good practice and ideas across services and between councils and sectors, and involves citizens and communities.
- **Technology and Data Enabled:** Makes best use of digital technology to build common solutions that can be reused and shared to create better value for money. Uses and shares data securely to inform decision-making, enable joint services and achieve better outcomes for citizens.
- **Innovative:** Has a culture of openness and improvement, looks outwards and explores how services can be delivered differently. Has the capacity, capability and processes in place to implement change.

4.3 The report makes a number of recommendations and observations around the six characteristics and appendix 1 provides some commentary on Argyll and Bute's progress against each.

4.4 Key messages: Some of the report's key messages further strengthen the case for increased investment in digital services and calls for effective governance arrangements to be developed to include:

- a committee or board with a remit to scrutinise digital programmes
- a digital delivery/programme board with overall strategic control
- an operational board or corporate groups to monitor delivery of specific digital programmes, which may be at service level or have cross-council membership.

5.0 CONCLUSION

It is no surprise that Scotland's 32 councils are at different stages of their journeys to become Digital Councils. There is no prescribed one size fits all model for all councils. Argyll and Bute has made great progress in recent years and has delivered real digital successes, which were evident in the way the council responded to the pandemic. However there are areas we can further improve and the report's findings will be used to help make improvements to the way that we progress on our digital journey. Audit Scotland noted a number of key common priorities for councils and investment in Digital and the governance arrangements around the Digital First programme should take priority. Other priorities where we already score well include:

- increasing online service provision, with round-the-clock self-service access – we continue to add to our portfolio of online services, resulting in over 4.4 million web page views and 35,000 online service requests fulfilled
- Digital Inclusion with investments in easy to use telephony automations (48,000 transactions including 9,000 phone payments), web assistants and web chat, Keep in the Loop pro-active updates and rollout of Connected Scotland free devices to the vulnerable digitally excluded.
- increasing flexible and mobile working, allowing staff to access real-time data for services such as social care and waste management – it's 10 years since we introduced flexible working underpinned with Skype unified communication and the technologies needed to allow our users to get remote, secure access to real-time data.
- using technology to support democratic functions such as hosting committee meetings and surgeries online – our democratic functions are in the midst of a major online move with council meetings taking place fully online.
- Digital Skills development through our schools, for our employees via LEON online training and our new Digital Learning Framework 2021-24 and to communities through Adult Learning.

The report's recommendations, where deemed suitable for the council, will play a pivotal role in the council's wider digital first transformation agenda. It presents useful guidance on digital progress in local government, as well as good practice examples from the six participating councils. The findings will be further assessed and compared against the council's strategic plans for digital to help determine any other areas of improvement for the council.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Policy – Aligns with the ICT and Digital Strategy
- 6.2 Financial – None from this report
- 6.3 Legal – None from this report
- 6.4 HR – aligns with the Digital Learning Strategy
- 6.5 Fairer Scotland Duty: No assessment required
 - 6.5.1 Equalities - protected characteristics No assessment required
 - 6.5.2 Socio-economic Duty – no assessment required
 - 6.5.3 Islands – no assessment required

- 6.6. Risk – Cyber security is now recognised as a red risk in the Strategic Risk Register and is a high priority for driving digital progress and innovations
- 6.7 Customer Service – Digital innovations have resulted in ongoing improvements to customer service as we automate and increase the number of enquiries resolved at first point of contact.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Council position on Audit Scotland Report

Appendix 2 – Audit Scotland Report – Digital Progress in Local Government

Appendix 1: Digital progress in local government – Council Position

Key Recommendations

Key Message	Recommendation	Comment
<p>1. Progress and impact of Covid-19</p> <p>Councils are at different stages of digital transformation. Progress is strongest where councils have focused on how digital technology can deliver better outcomes for people. The pace of change has increased as digital technologies have played a vital role in the public sector's response to the Covid-19 pandemic. It has also heightened the awareness of digital exclusion.</p>	<p>To maintain momentum, councils should assess their progress, learn lessons, and identify and address barriers and inequalities.</p>	<p>The Council's new ICT and Digital Strategy has focused on how digital technology can deliver better outcomes for people – both our staff and our customers. The actions in the plan include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • be inclusive and put customers' needs first; • make services more efficient through the adoption of new ways of working enabled by technology; • put services online and encourage all of our people and customers to use them by default; • work in real-time - with systems available 24/7; • be automated - with minimal manual processing; • be intelligent and pre-emptive of the next steps and future trends; • be secure and accessible anytime. <p>These will build on considerable investments already made in automated and assistive technologies to make our digital services as accessible as possible. In</p>

		<p>April 2021 our website ranked 11th for accessibility out of all UK council websites. Progress in rural areas is more challenging compared with progress in fibre filled cities due to the 'not spots' for broadband and mobile.</p> <p>We will continue to use our channels in the Digital Office to raise the challenges of remote and rural connectivity and ensure that these are reflected in any standards adopted to define a 'Digital Council'</p>
<p>2. Becoming a digital council</p> <p>Clear vision and leadership, with workforce and community engagement, are essential for realising the benefits of digital transformation. Delivering change requires a culture of collaboration and innovation, as well as aligned strategies and plans, effective governance, and engaged and informed elected members.</p>	<p>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.</p> <p>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.</p>	<p>Our ICT and Digital Strategy sets out a clear vision about digital improvements and transformation. Plans are underway to develop a new HSCP Digital Strategy, which will further strengthen Argyll and Bute's strategic position on digital services. Detailed delivery plans are in development to deliver the Digital Strategy Action Plan and progress will be monitored as part of our Digital by Default or Digital First programme approach. The new strategy is supported by four key themes - Customers, Technology, Processes, and People. The strategy matches ICT and Digital services with the council's ambition for service improvement and sustainability through digital innovation. It sets out how ICT and Digital services will be designed, sourced and delivered, and how digital technologies</p>

		<p>and processes can support our people and our customers to work better together</p> <p>We agree with the need for a structured approach to collaboration and innovation and our departments need to assess their own digital capability in delivering services and dedicate the resource required to do so. The new MS365 platform includes a number of new tools and capabilities that will facilitate this. We are keen to develop a culture that allows us sufficient time and space to fully test and learn – and allows us to fail. An integrated approach of best use of technology, effective and structured service design along with strategic digital leadership will take the organisation forward with a clear digital vision.</p> <p>This will be best approached through the systematic use of BPR and sessions on the Art of the Possible for Managers, which we will seek support from the Digital Office to deliver.</p> <p>We are already active members of the Digital Office partnerships as well as others such as Pathfinder North. We participated widely in regional partnerships during the Covid response for matters as diverse as Caring for People to excess death management and all had a strong digital best practice sharing element.</p>
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3. Citizens at the heart

There has been a lack of citizen involvement in digital service design and not enough focus on outcomes in monitoring progress of digital programmes.

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.

The Council already engages with our Citizens and there are significant online resources for our customers. The Recovering Council group commissioned a survey on customer engagement post covid that had 998 responses and which had specific segments on digital customer service. These will feed into the new Customer Service Strategy.

Engagement with communities is a key theme of our BV3 action plan.

We will focus more engagement around digital service delivery to ensure that we are meeting customer need. This past year has seen many successes including online planning consultation meetings and consultation with Community Groups around covid support pathways and response. We also have over 5,000 citizens subscribed to receive invites to surveys and consultations via the Keep in the Loop Service and many regularly do so; hence the significant increase for example in Budget Consultation responses.

Regarding Service Design Skills we successfully submitted an application for funding to the Flexible Workforce Development Fund for a grant to fund Service Design Training from the Scottish Service Design Academy for relevant

		<p>managers. In addition, we are developing a strategic position on the Scottish Approach to Service Design. We have a candidate on the Digital Office/SCVO Digital Training Programme, who will then use that knowledge to design an appropriate digital champion approach for Argyll and Bute. We have current participants in and alumni of the Scottish Digital Champions Programme operated by Heriot Watt University and Scottish Government.</p> <p>Adopting a more structured approach to service design, and building on the engagement improvements we have planned as part of our BV3 Action plan, we aim to engage further with citizens to better understand their expectations for all aspects of service deliver – both in person and online/ self-service. There are community/ customer engagement forums e.g. in Education and other services but the focus of those are not specific to digital services, This is an area for further consideration and development.</p> <p>A better understanding of our outcomes can also be achieved through deriving better value from our data to evidence better outcomes. We will improve our use of data analytics and develop a consistent approach to using the SASD process to improve this and enable us to develop better methods of engagement to gauge</p>
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		outcomes and success or otherwise of service delivery decisions.
<p>4. Workforce and skills</p> <p>Insufficient staff capacity and digital skills are the most significant barriers to progress. There are digital skills initiatives in place, but there needs to be better alignment with councils' wider workforce plans.</p>	<p>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.</p>	<p>The council has recently approved its Digital Learning Framework 2021-24 which addresses all of the elements noted here along with an action plan route map of activities.</p>
<p>5. Data and technology</p> <p>Councils are starting to develop strategies to make better use of data. Data standards, governance and ethics are important areas in which councils need to make progress. Legacy systems, however, remain a barrier.</p>	<p>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.</p> <p>Councils should work with the Digital Office and Scottish Government in developing common data standards and a data ethics approach.</p>	<p>We ensure close and regular monitoring of the performance, integration and security of all our ICT systems and applications. These are assessed on the basis of performance, effectiveness, security and cost. Our guiding principle is to simplify and reduce the number of different systems applications that we use, where there is the scope to do so. This is implemented in a planned way to ensure that business effectiveness is maintained and improved wherever possible.</p> <p>There are some systems that local government must use as they are nationally managed – e.g. the Planning portal. Councils therefore have limited scope to deal with these legacy systems.</p>

		<p>There is an assumption here that legacy systems are a problem. However we must remember that these systems met the requirements for services when last tendered. If the service requirements have changed and legacy systems become unsuitable or do not offer the functionality required to support service delivery then we should be looking to replace or upgrade legacy systems.</p> <p>We are already doing so with the main Health and Social Care, Finance, and HR systems – all are currently being replaced. Replacement is expensive and the council is aware of the significant resources required to continue to upgrade and replace with more coordinated solutions. We must exploit existing opportunities to effect the development and value of 3rd party systems to us through effective participation in national user groups. The key issue is to make the data these systems contain more accessible, more meaningful, more joined up and better configured to enable organisation-wide analysis.</p> <p>We continue to monitor progress that the Digital Office makes in negotiating major new contracts for common platforms and shared systems across local government and look forward to seeing the financial benefits of this once delivered. We continue to work with the Digital Office and other</p>
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		<p>partners to maximise the benefit of any shared opportunities that arise.</p>
<p>6. National leadership and collaboration</p> <p>There needs to be greater leadership and clarity of roles at a national level, with consistent vision and direction across the sector. The Digital Office has enabled councils to collaborate, share knowledge and innovate. Opportunities exist for it to do more but this requires changes to how it works, how councils support it and how it is funded.</p>	<p>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:</p> <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. 	<p>The refresh of the Digital Strategy presents local government with a framework for digital transformation, which is welcome. The Council's Digital Strategy has been developed in parallel with this national strategy and so reflects and aligns with many of the key elements of the overall vision.</p> <p>As a remote, rural and island council, we have embraced a strong leadership role in digital transformation and, with our well established arrangements for remote and flexible working, underpinned by secure full vpn access and Skype for Business telephony, we were extremely well positioned to make the full transition to online working for all networked staff rapidly at the outset of Covid. This supported the Council's effective online Governance, including the Business Continuity Committee, remote learning in our schools as well as the rapid enablement of multiple online processes to support grants, payments, food, vulnerable people services etc.</p> <p>Our long term commitment to digital innovation has been at the heart of our service delivery for years, with embedded ICT Client Liaison Officers in services, ongoing channel shift, innovative digital</p>

		<p>solutions to remote service delivery, TEC and more.</p> <p>We look forward to seeing the Digital Office progress in areas of work where Councils will gain further benefit e.g. negotiate national contracts with major software and systems providers such as Microsoft, Oracle, OLM etc.</p> <p>We will continue to engage with the DO and around Digital Leadership in Local Government, which is another area where we look forward to the DO adding value, supporting and advising political leadership and COSLA in some of the more sensitive areas of digital service delivery. This is particularly pertinent in areas where there can be a reluctance by elected members to 'lose' visible frontline presence, whilst a digital solution would provide a more cost effective option.</p> <p>The Council is well placed to highlight the role that digital service provision plays in reducing inequality of access to services, caused by geographical remoteness and we monitor progress against this in performance reports.</p> <p>A consistent vision is a challenge where priorities and service needs can be as diverse as they are across Scotland. But a broad commitment to digital delivery across the public sector is welcomed, and the value</p>
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		<p>of the DO can be in articulating that critical message nationally, not to digital practitioners, but to communities, community representatives and elected members: that a digital approach is valued, valuable and desirable – not a threat to or removal of service.</p> <p>The DO is a valued partner and we look forward to seeing council investment matched by return.</p> <p>The council is a very active Partner in both Digital Office, Improvement Service and other Scottish Government bodies such as the National Digital Identity Project and is at the forefront of many national initiatives from MyAccount to Pathfinder North. We also participate in many other digital forums such as SOCITM Scotland and the Scottish Local Government Contact Centre Manager's Group.</p>
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Key Messages	Council Position
<p>Digital Leadership:</p> <p>Councils that are making progress have a digital vision and strategy focused on improving outcomes for citizens</p>	<p>We have a new ICT and Digital Strategy with a clear ICT and Digital Vision to provide digital technologies and processes to support our people and our customers, to encourage collaboration, get things done and contribute to a better organised and more efficient council, delivering on our Outcomes. Our ICT Digital Vision is supported by four key themes - Customers, Technology, Processes, and People</p> <p>Our goals as a digital first authority are listed and specifically include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • be inclusive and put customers' needs first; • make services more efficient through the adoption of new ways of working enabled by technology; • put services online and encourage all of our people and customers to use them by default; <p>We also have a new Digital Learning Framework so that the technology is supported by digital skills for our people and the new Customer Service Strategy is in development regarding digital customer engagement post covid.</p>
<p>Digital strategies are most effective when leaders champion change and staff are engaged</p>	<p>We are at an early stage of implementing our strategy and this engagement will be established and sustained.</p>
<p>Leadership teams must have the right level of digital awareness, expertise and skills</p>	<p>Our leadership teams are participating in the Scottish Government's Digital Champions programme and funding has been sourced for Service Design training for managers.</p>
<p>Involvement of elected members is not well developed</p>	<p>Our elected members have been using Skype for Business and iPads for all committee papers for several years now. This has been an essential element of managing our remote and island area and providing them with the appropriate tools for their roles. Members are involved in new strategy development and our Policy Lead for Customer Services is very closely involved. We operate regular engagement sessions and seminars with our elected members. Most recently this included a Customer Service and Web session, which</p>

	<p>highlighted all of the current and developing digital features for our customers online. We included a demonstration of the recently developed Alexa skill that gives bin collection days. Our members' ICT virtual drop in sessions is helping to provide digital skills training and support for elected members. The Digital Office were developing an Elected Members Digital Training Programme, but this was suspended for covid priorities, and we look forward to this workstream recommencing. We have an established programme to deliver online training and develop digital skills via LEON, which is available to all elected members.</p>
<p>Councils have adjusted governance arrangements to ensure the right level of scrutiny for digital programmes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As part of our Digital by default programme, we are in the process of establishing an ICT and Digital board, led by senior officers, which will oversee all aspects of our digital journey. a digital delivery/programme board with overall strategic control and direction • operational/project boards or corporate groups to monitor delivery of specific digital programmes, which may be at service level or have cross-council membership
<p>Investment to date has been largely focused on technology and infrastructure</p>	<p>The Council, given its remote, rural and island geography, has been an early adopter of remote working and has successfully managed this in a secure and user friendly way. This has meant that as we have progressed on our digital journey since the introduction of MS Lync/Skype for Business in 2011 we have had a parallel process of investment in infrastructure and technology being accompanied by skills development and adaptations to management techniques. We put together skills for managers in remote learning when we implemented skype for business in 2011. This has meant that our teams and managers are very skilled in and adept at remote working, remote meetings, remote team building, and remote collaboration. This also meant we were well prepared to adapt to using MS Teams at the start of the pandemic. Our next phase in development is planned around the opportunities presented by MS365 and the associated</p>

	<p>Robotic Process Automation to improve efficiency. Again these will include both the technology and the associated skills and different ways of working.</p> <p>Data analytics is an area where support from the DO would be welcome. Councils are data rich, but lack the skills in house to maximise the use of that data to improve services and efficiencies.</p>
<p>Covid-19 has helped develop digital leadership and moved digital transformation up councils' agendas</p>	<p>There were many authorities across Scotland who struggled to deal with the impact of the lockdown on service delivery. Argyll and Bute already had established policies, skills and technologies in place to allow staff to work from home and have access to almost all key systems. Our day to day business was not affected by any lack of progress in digital but we had issues when dealing with other organisations who did not have such well-established systems and plans. Hence for example it was our CRM, Unified Comms and browser based caseload management systems that underpinned the Caring for People Partnership that supported our vulnerable citizens and our Keep in The Loop proactive comms that issued over 1.2 million coronavirus updates to individuals including the Shielded. Digital leadership and digital transformation is well established in our council</p>
<p>User Focused:</p>	
<p>Involving users in service design is still limited in practice</p>	<p>We have established groups of Systems Admins and users who are involved at every stage of a system procurement. This includes user based development of system requirements. Our users also contribute to national user groups where systems are reviewed and redesigned to suit current trends and requirements. We operate with a small scale ICT development team who work directly with front line users to design small scale systems.</p> <p>The Scottish approach to service design "Design with, not for" is embedded in our Customer Engagement Team who use a variety of approaches to involve users in new solutions and actively gather their feedback. Digital collaboration has however become much easier with</p>

	so many citizens now using Teams etc, so this is something that will be more intensively adopted going forward.
Councils need to improve how they monitor outcomes from digital change	Post Project reviews include this in the scoring of project success. This is a long established process in Argyll and Bute. We also have long standing and detailed performance reports from our customers in response to service changes to digital. They response is generally very positive as it improves efficiency and self-service.
Councils are adopting a 'digital first' approach but must ensure that no one is left behind	We will to continue to deliver services in the traditional way until the digital exclusion barriers are removed - fibre for all, skills for all, and devices for all. There are a number of national initiatives designed to address these barriers and the council is an active participant in all of them. We fully implemented our 2016 Digital Inclusion Strategy and this will be renewed as part of the Customer Service Strategy recommendations. We ensure that we carry out Fairer Scotland Duty impact assessments for all of our service change proposals, to ensure appropriate engagement is carried out and no disadvantage is caused.
Digital Workforce:	
Insufficient staff capacity and digital skills are the most significant barriers to progress	We have a new Digital Learning Framework so that the technology is supported by digital skills for our people and there will be a full Digital Skills Audit as part of that.
Councils need to improve workforce planning	Our workforce planning processes will be further developed to take account of how new technologies will affect the workforce. While we have a new ICT and Digital strategy in place we accept that digital transformation needs to be driven by the service departments and must ensure the workforce, especially those operating on the front line, has the skills to support digital transformation.
Councils are 'growing their own' digital capacity and skills in a variety of ways	We have 6 excellent recent examples of digital apprentices and ICT trainees who have undertaken learning with us and moved on into permanent posts.

Working with business partners can accelerate digital transformation but councils still need their own expertise	We will work with business partners to provide additional capacity, knowledge and expertise, and to fill skills gaps.
Collaborative:	
Collaboration is needed within councils to support council-wide change	The pandemic resulted in much greater levels of collaboration within our council. This is evident in the joint work of the Tactical and Recovering Council groups. It's important we continue that trend to exploit some of the digital opportunities available for collaboration in systems such as MS365.
The Digital Office has helped councils collaborate, share knowledge and innovate but its overall impact is not clear	The report recognizes that "The Digital Office and Partnership programme is large and complex. It is not clear which projects have been of greatest value, there are differing views across councils as to its overall impact, and it is not clear who is accountable for delivery." We will continue to work with the Digital Office on the projects we see of value to our strategic objectives and will openly discuss and consider all options for funding put before us.
The Digital Office's current delivery model is not sufficient to deliver the pace of change required	We agree that the Digital Office's delivery and funding model should be reviewed and its work programme focused on the priorities that councils have agreed for it. We also need to see how the Scottish Government will implement the actions in its new Digital Strategy – How Scotland will thrive in a digital world. The Scottish Government's Digital Transformation Service and associated projects will have a big part to play and we will use all available resources to work with both.
A refreshed digital strategy for Scotland provides an opportunity to set out a shared vision and priorities, and to clarify roles and responsibilities at national level	We welcome the new digital strategy for Scotland and will work with our partners to help deliver the priorities affecting Argyll and Bute. See above comment regarding capacity however.
There are barriers to jointly procuring and sharing systems and developing common platforms	We are actively engaging in the new national asset management platform (STAMP) which is intended to allow councils to make informed decisions about the procurement of digital technology solutions. Once populated we will work with the Digital Office and

	Scotland Excel to use this platform for joint procurement and collaboration.
Place-based strategies involving stakeholders from across a region are important in taking a more collaborative approach	We have worked for many years on community or regional hub developments. One such example, Pathfinder North, has successfully operated and delivered improvements to the council's core digital network for 15 years
Technology and Data Enabled:	
Councils need to address legacy systems and put in place a more simplified technical architecture	The council operates within our resource capacity and our legacy systems are being updated or replaced as we can afford to do so and only if a more suitable solution becomes available. We have also become adept at integrating our systems to reduce double handling and ensure efficient data exchanges using a variety of integration approaches.
Digitally mature councils have digital strategies with a focus on data	We agree. Our aim is to unlock the value of our data through improved management, access and analysis to gain insight, better inform our decision making and better monitor outcomes. We will embrace the principles of sharing our data with our partners and customers whilst maintaining its confidentiality, integrity and availability, through compliance with data protection legislation and the use of secure information sharing platforms. We will work closely and follow keenly the work of the SLGDO on this area of significant priority for local government.
Councils need to put data governance frameworks in place	We agree and will work with our information governance colleagues on the development of common data standards and data ethics approaches. There is a significant skills shortage in this area and we have asked the DO to consider a joint Data Scientist role – someone who could be shared across councils.
Innovative:	
Councils are at an early stage of developing the shared digital culture needed to support change and innovation	We already look outwards, we are proactive about improvement and strive always for innovation and inclusive growth. As a result our IT systems are reliable, accessible and almost always available to our

	<p>workforce. We need to develop an understanding of the implications of a culture that allows us sufficient time and space to fully test and learn – and allows us to fail so that we can learn and improve. The report suggests a digital culture should also have permission to take risks, but understands the risk threshold and has a ‘fail fast, fail forward’ ethos – taking an agile approach, doing things iteratively and in small steps, learning from mistakes and moving on. This is likely to have resource implications for the council.</p>
<p>People need to be outward looking and be given the space and time to innovate</p>	<p>We will consider the development of an Innovation Strategy to help develop business cases and works with suppliers to test the feasibility of new approaches, using a ‘prove and explore’ approach</p>
<p>Councils are using different approaches to support transformation but this requires skills that are in short supply</p>	<p>We don’t yet have the skills to introduce agile or open innovation methods or problem based procurement. We will look to develop guidance on Agile principles to supplement formal project management training. We are embarking on new MS365 technologies with a requirement for new skillsets which will need further investment by the council in order to exploit the opportunities this brings.</p>