NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

GOVERNANCE AND AUDIT COMMITTEE

26th January 2024

REPORT OF THE CHIEF DIGITAL OFFICER

Wards Affected: All Wards

Matter for <u>information</u>

Audit Wales Digital Strategy Review – Organisational Response

Purpose of the Report

1. This report provides Members with an overview of the findings and single recommendation from the recent Audit Wales thematic review of the NPT Digital Data and Technology Strategy – full report contained within Appendix 2.

2. Following approval at Cabinet on the 28th November 2023, Members are requested to note the organisational response contained in Appendix 3.

Executive Summary

3. In January 2023, Audit Wales informed the council that they would be carrying out a thematic review of Digital Strategies across all 22 councils in Wales. The final scope of the review is contained in Appendix 1.

4. Given the extensive work that was underway to develop an innovative new NPT Digital Data and Technology Strategy, with an agreed timeline to report to Council for adoption in July 2023, it was agreed that the Audit Wales review would take place after the strategy had been considered by Council.

5. The Neath Port Talbot [Digital Data and Technology (DDaT) Strategy](#) was formally approved and adopted by Council on 12th July 2023.

Background

6. The Audit Wales Digital Strategy Thematic Review set out to answer the question *'In developing its digital strategy has the Council acted in accordance with the sustainable development principle and put in place proper arrangements to secure value for money in the use of its resources?'*

7. The objectives of the review were as follows:

   - *provide assurance that the councils' digital strategies will help to deliver well-being objectives in a way that secures value for money in the use of resources;*

   - *provide assurance that councils are acting in accordance with the sustainable development principal in the design of their digital strategies;*

   - *explain how councils are using/planning to use digital technology to meet people's needs and deliver better outcomes; and*

   - *inspire and empower councils and other public sector bodies by identifying and sharing examples of notable practice/ approaches where relevant.*

8. During July 2023, Audit Wales undertook a comprehensive audit of the supporting documentation and evidence which was used to develop the NPT DDaT strategy.

9. The audit was also informed by interviews with Digital Services senior officers and the Cabinet Member with responsibility for the development of the council's digital strategy, as well as a sample of Cabinet Members and senior officers from key portfolios / service areas impacted by the digital strategy.

10. A draft report was issued to officers in September for review and following a collaborative engagement with Audit Wales to clarify a number of areas, the final report was received on the 27th October – Appendix 2.

11. The key findings contained within the report are as follows:

We found that the Council's strategic approach to digital is informed by a good understanding of its digital provision and the Council drew on a range of data from external sources.

The Council's strategic approach to digital is well aligned with its other key plans and strategies and those of its partners and it has strong arrangements to communicate its strategic digital approach.

The Council has committed resources to support delivery of its digital strategy but does not yet know its long-term cost implications.

The Council is developing comprehensive arrangements to assess and monitor the impact of its digital approach, however the absence of a clear timeframe to deliver its digital strategy will make it difficult for the Council to assess progress and value for money.

The Council reviewed its previous digital strategy, learnt from this and shares its learning.

12. The report is generally very positive and contains a single recommendation for consideration as follows:

If the Council continues with the approach of not stating a timeframe to deliver its Digital, Data and Technology strategy, it should put in place arrangements to:

- *clearly articulate its short, medium and long term outcomes and intended benefits;*

- *cost its short, medium and long term ambitions and match them with available resources; and*

- *assess if it is delivering the strategy and its intended outcomes at the intended pace.*

13. As officers were still in the process of developing the new delivery plan to underpin the new DDaT Strategy which had just been adopted at the point of the Audit, they were not able to include this in their review. It should be noted that one of the key findings confirms that

the Council is developing comprehensive arrangements to assess and monitor the impact of its digital approach.

14. Officers are confident that the robust programme delivery arrangements that have now been put in place are meeting all the areas highlighted in the recommendation and have included details in the Cabinet approved organisational response (Appendix 3).

Financial Impacts:

15. There are no financial impacts.

Integrated Impact Assessment:

16. Not required.

Valleys Communities Impacts:

17. There are no Valleys Community impacts.

Workforce Impacts:

18. There are no workforce impacts.

Legal Impacts:

19. There are no legal impacts.

Risk Management Impacts:

20. There are no risk management impacts.

Consultation:

21. There is no requirement for consultation on this item.

Recommendations:

22. For the Committee to note the Cabinet approved Organisational Response document (Appendix 3).

Appendices:

Appendix 1 - Audit Wales Digital Strategy Review Final Brief

Appendix 2 – Audit Wales Digital Strategy Review Final Report
Appendix 3 – Cabinet approved NPT Organisational Response to Audit Wales

List of background papers: None

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