

**Minutes of the Future Council Scrutiny Committee  
Wednesday, 23<sup>rd</sup> November, 2022 at 6.00 pm  
In Committee Room 2, The Council House, Priory Road, Dudley**

**Present:**

Councillor E Lawrence (Chair)  
Councillor A Davies (Vice-Chair)  
Councillors S Ali, H Bills, R Collins, T Creed, P Dobb, J Foster, M Howard, I Kettle, A Lees, T Russon and P Sahota.

**Officers:**

L Fulci (Director of Digital, Customer and Commercial Services), N Biddle (Head of Digital and Customer Services), G Aulakh (Head of Technology Systems and Services), S Cooper (Head of Corporate Landlord Services), H Coldicott (Team Manager – Facilities Management), H Martin (Director of Regeneration and Enterprise) and K Taylor (Senior Democratic Services Officer).

---

**24 Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors C Barnett and K Shakespeare.

---

**25 Appointment of Substitute Members**

It was noted that Councillors H Bills and R Collins had been appointed as substitute Members for Councillors C Barnett and K Shakespeare, respectively, for this meeting of the Committee only.

---

---

26 **Declarations of Interest**

No member made a declaration of interest in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct.

---

27 **Minutes**

**Resolved**

That the minutes of the meeting held on 12<sup>th</sup> October, 2022 be approved as a correct record and signed.

---

28 **Public Forum**

No issues were raised under this agenda item.

---

29 **Digital and Technology Services Update**

A report of the Director of Digital, Customer and Commercial Services was submitted on an update on ongoing and planned developments relating to Digital and Technology Services.

In presenting the report submitted, the Director of Digital, Customer and Commercial Services referred to the Digital and Technology governance model implemented in October, 2021 including the establishment of the Councillor Digital Forum, Digital and Technology Working Group and a Digital Board.

Reference was made to the accessibility and storage of personal and sensitive data of members of the public by the Local Authority and the need to be more vigilant in areas relating to cyber security. It was noted that a dedicated officer had been appointed and was working alongside the Head of Technology Systems and Services in mitigating against any potential cyber-attacks.

Members were advised that the restructure of the ICT Team had now been completed, where staff had been fully engaged and supported during the process, with no compulsory redundancies being required.

Reference was made to the procurement of a new digital platform for the development of a simple and easy to use online tool for members of the public in order to deliver an improved and accessible service.

It was noted that five digital and technology business cases would be submitted to the Cabinet for consideration including replacement of core infrastructure to store the council data centre and an upgrade to enhanced Microsoft E5 licences providing additional cyber security improvements and facilities such as collaboration tools to enable hybrid working.

Members asked questions, made comments and responses were given where appropriate as follows: -

- a) Councillor H Bills referred to the significant costs associated with the upgrade to Microsoft E5 Licences and questioned whether these had been forecasted within the proposed Budget.

Whilst acknowledging the costs involved, the Director of Digital, Customer and Commercial Services confirmed that this could be alleviated against savings that could be achieved from the decommissioning of some services. The Head of Technology Systems and Services also referred to a presentation he had produced providing further information which could be shared with the Committee for information.

- b) The Chair referred to the potential security threats to systems and information held by the Local Authority and reiterated that although an upgrade to E5 licences was expensive, this outweighed the significant implications as a result of a cyber-attack including temporary loss of access to files or networks or corruption to online services and applications.

In responding, the Head of Technology Systems and Services commented on the work required to ensure that the Local Authority met the criteria needed for insurance coverage for cyber risks.

- c) The Head of Digital and Customer Services confirmed that processes were being created specifically for residents and users with consideration being given to appropriate language and terminology. The proposed system would enable a singular account, with one password, and allow residents to process online payments and report any issues or complaints. Automatic escalations would be implemented to monitor progress made to queries, together with mechanisms to open conversations with residents which would prevent any unnecessary delays. Members were assured that the new system would be in addition to existing services including telephone and face-to-face conversations at Dudley Council Plus.
- d) Arising from concerns raised by Councillor T Creed in relation to staff turnover and the implications this had on progress made to queries that had been raised, the Head of Digital and Customer Services confirmed that the new platform would remove single dependency and all queries would be automatically forwarded to a dedicated team. It was noted that although this feature would improve response times, further work was needed to improve staff behaviours to ensure that priority was being given to responding to complaints and queries to both residents and Councillors.
- e) In responding to a question raised by Councillor T Russon in relation to reporting software and whether Councillor End input could be facilitated to assist Member case work, the Head of Digital and Customer Services confirmed that providers were currently being reviewed to identify whether this could be achieved.
- f) It was noted that external enquiries including those made via telephone and face to face would be automatically entered into the same electronic system for responding.
- g) With regard to additional security for Elected Members electronic devices, the Head of Technology Systems and Services confirmed that Councillors Accounts operated within a separate domain to employees, and that the upgrade to E5 licences would amalgamate all accounts to one domain. Bitlocker encryption and Microsoft defender software had been deployed to all laptops and would be extended to Members once the upgrade had been completed, to enable better access and protection outside of the Council's network.

- h) Councillor I Kettle shared his concerns and experiences of the significant delays by the ICT Team in responding to requests and queries.

In responding, the Director of Digital, Customer and Commercial Services acknowledged the comments made, however she referred to the significant improvement made within a short period of time to performance targets in relation to response times since the Head of Digital and Customer Services had commenced her role within the Local Authority.

- i) Councillor I Kettle referred to the lack of detailed information in relation to the number of employees affected by the restructure of the ICT Team and allocated budget within the report submitted. He also considered that in order to improve existing processes, priority should be given to the allocation of funding and should be referenced within the Medium Term Financial Strategy accordingly.

The Director of Digital, Customer and Commercial Services undertook to provide further information in relation to budgets and the restructure of the ICT Team for information.

- j) The need to simplify systems and processes for users was emphasised, and in responding to a question raised, the Head of Technology Systems and Services confirmed that Microsoft E5 licences allowed users to identify when officers were available to be contacted.
- k) It was confirmed that existing equipment or hardware would not be replaced following the proposed licence upgrade.
- l) Councillor P Sahota welcomed the report submitted and expressed his appreciation to officers in addressing and moving forward with this area of work. In referring to the restructure of the ICT Team, he questioned whether staff surveys had been undertaken which could be utilised as a baseline for future monitoring and assessment.
- m) Councillor P Sahota also suggested that following implementation of new processes, revised Key Performance Indicator's should be benchmarked moving forward.

- n) Councillor P Sahota referred to his varied experiences in receiving responses to queries raised via Councillor Contact which further highlighted the need for improvements and also queried whether the new digital platform could also be utilised by Members.

In responding, the Director of Digital, Customer and Commercial Services welcomed and acknowledged all comments made and reiterated that responses to complaints were improving with 72% being responded to within 20 days, and also confirmed that further work would be undertaken to improve Councillor Contact.

- o) In responding to Councillor T Russon's suggestion of using Microsoft Teams for external calls following the upgrade to E5 licenses, the Head of Technology Systems and Services confirmed that a phased approach would be undertaken within the enhancement and that option appraisals would be undertaken at that phase to identify services and trends available.
- p) Councillor H Bills commented positively on the Councillor Contact facility accessed via the Dudley Website and considered that all Members should be provided with demonstrations on how to operate the service effectively. She also suggested that the "Dudley App" should be promoted more widely.
- q) The Chair considered that by developing technology, this could significantly improve recruitment opportunities by offering an enhanced employment package for prospective applicants for Dudley.
- r) Reference was made in relation to the proposed Digital Platform project and reassurance was sought that the product identified was appropriate for Dudley.

In responding, the Head of Digital and Customer Services referred to the tendering process undertaken which included technical dialogue and a request for previous Local Authority experience as desirable. It was considered that the dialogue used initiated a number of comprehensive bids and Members were assured that extensive research had been undertaken and specific questions had been asked to the prospective suppliers as to how they could deliver facilities that were not currently provided by the Council.

- s) It was noted that members from the Councillor Forum would be invited to view the proposed product and platform prior to approval.

- t) Councillor I Kettle suggested that all staff should be encouraged to report any technology issues they had experienced.
- u) Councillor S Ali welcomed measures identified in safeguarding cyber security and suggested that Councillor Contact be streamlined and modelled on a case worker basis to ensure that all queries were responded to promptly by Officers, to enable Members to undertake their role efficiently and effectively.
- v) Councillor S Ali referred to the customer experience in operating and accessing the Dudley website and in doing so sought clarification as to whether engagement would be undertaken with residents and members of the public in relation to the proposed digital platform.

In responding, the Head of Digital and Customer Services confirmed that the Web Team had relocated to Dudley Council Plus where they were able to witness and gather an overview of queries raised including both face to face and via telephone. This provided the opportunity to develop the specific criteria needed to ensure that the platform was fit for purpose. It was noted that the successful supplier would be requested to review the demographics within the Borough and seek representations from a variety of groups including Resident Groups. The Committee were informed that members of the public would be invited to test the facility prior to implementation at places including Citizens Advice Bureau and Libraries.

### **Resolved**

- (1) That the update on the ongoing and planned developments relating to Digital and Technology Services, as summarised in paragraph 2 of the report submitted, be noted.
- (2) That the Head of Technology Systems and Services be requested to provide detailed information in relation to the financial costs associated with the proposed upgrade to Microsoft E5 Licences to the Committee for information.
- (3) That the Director of Digital, Customer and Commercial Services be requested to provide further information in relation to budgets and the restructure of the ICT Team to the Committee for information.

---

## 30 **Update on the Council House Refurbishment Presentation**

The Head of Corporate Landlord Services gave a detailed presentation updating Members on the refurbishment of the Council House.

In presenting key information, the Head of Corporate Landlord Services provided a summary of the main points suggested by the Committee at the meeting in March, 2022. Following further investigation, it was noted that the disabled parking spaces situated on Priory Road, Dudley were located 50 yards from the disabled access on the lower ground of the Council House with appropriate signage. It was confirmed that the layout of the Members Car Park had been reviewed and reconfigured with three dedicated disabled parking spaces allocated. The Committee was assured that appropriate advice and consideration had been given to the proposals made in relation to Equality and Accessibility by representatives of Access in Dudley and the Local Authorities Equality Officer.

It was confirmed that the proposals to include a new accessible passenger lift from the Members Car park in order to access the ground and first floor levels and the public gallery, together with new platform lifts to the curved stairs from the basement to the first floor of the Council House, would not be included due to insufficient funding. However, allowances had been made to improve the existing lift.

Maps identifying proposed access improvements throughout the Council House was displayed at the meeting.

The Team Manager – Facilities Management informed Members that the major elements of disrepair including the roof had been addressed through a phased approach and was in progress. It was noted that a new air source heat pump, funded by the Public Sector Decarbonisation Grants, had been installed alongside Asbestos removal from ducts and progress made in relation to installation of energy saving Light Emitting Diode (LED) lighting across the campus.

Developing work on key functional areas had commenced with consideration on improving security and controlling access to the building, however it was recognised that the Council House should remain open and welcoming to the public. The constraints associated with the Grade 2 Building Status was mentioned however the introduction of automatic barriers and gates was considered appropriate.



A programme of timeframes was outlined with the roof expected to be completed by May 2023 with all phases expected to be completed by Spring 2024. It was noted that phase one of the programme would be undertaken during January and April, 2023, and it was expected that there would be some disruption during this period as the Council House would remain open.

An update on the budget was outlined recognising the Council's current financial position and savings achieved through Grant funded work. The budget was being closely monitored to ensure that the programme did not escalate above the allocated spend.

The Committee were informed of the points for consideration during the refurbishment including the movement of staff and their equipment taking into account the change in working styles, use of desk space and the use of Members car park for access by builders.

Following the presentation, Members asked questions, made comments and responses were given where appropriate as follows: -

- a) In responding to a question raised by the Chair in relation to the communications work in the Council Chamber and Committee Rooms 1 and 2, it was confirmed that a budget of £130,000 had been allocated and assurance was given that the work would be implemented and completed by April, 2023. The Director of Digital, Customer and Commercial Services also reported that independent advice would be sought in relation to Acoustics.
- b) Councillor I Kettle requested that further consideration be given to the allocation of a small number of car parking spaces in the Members Car Park for larger sized vehicles.
- c) In responding to comments made by Councillor H Bills, the Head of Corporate Landlord Services confirmed that motion lighting would be installed in all locations where possible.
- d) Councillor H Bills suggested that the term 'Disabled' be replaced with 'Disability'.

- e) Councillor P Sahota referred to the potential risks to budgets and timelines as a result of external factors including inflation costs, and sought reassurance as to whether the Local Authority had taken those into account and was confident in completing the programme agreed.

In responding, the Head of Corporate Landlord Services assured Members that the Design Team involved had experience in dealing with complicated projects and that contingency plans had been incorporated. He referred to the programme being delivered in a phased approach which could be amended, withdrawn and considered by Full Council at any point if the project was no longer deemed achievable. It was confirmed that expenditure would continually be monitored and that the tendering process for phase two would not be undertaken until Phase one had completed.

- f) In responding to a question raised by Councillor T Russon, the Team Manager – Facilities Management undertook to provide further information and cost savings following the installation of LED lighting.
- g) In responding to comments made by Members, further consideration would be given to the installation of Electric Vehicle Charging Points within the Members Car Park, including those allocated for disability parking.
- h) Reference was made as to whether solar powered panels had been considered as part of the roof repairs, however as the roof was 60% completed, it was anticipated that these would not have been considered feasible for the Council House Building. It was confirmed however that they had been installed on the new Duncan Edwards Leisure Centre.
- i) Councillor S Ali emphasised the need to preserve historical furniture throughout the building and that the facilities and rooms available at the Council House, including the Council Chamber, should be promoted to the wider population and schools.

## **Resolved**

- (1) That the information contained within the presentation on the refurbishment of the Council House, be noted.
- (2) That the Head of Corporate Landlord Services consider the comments and suggestions made by the Committee, as outlined above.

- (3) That the Team Manager – Facilities Management be requested to provide further information and cost savings in relation to the installation of LED lighting.
- 

31 **Future Council Scrutiny Progress Tracker and Future Business**

**Resolved**

That the Future Council Scrutiny Progress Tracker and Future Business, as outlined in the report, be noted.

The meeting ended at 7.40pm

CHAIR