WOKING BOROUGH COUNCIL DIGITAL STRATEGY 2022-2025

Executive Summary

At a meeting with CMG and subsequently with the Portfolio Holder in April 2020, it was determined that producing a Digital Strategy would provide the Council and the Borough's wider community, a foundation to meet the challenges presented by existing and new digital technologies. The strategy sets out the Council's vision how it will use technology to continue to provide high quality, high priority and highly valued services for its residents, to enable businesses to be even more competitive, to grow, be innovative, forward thinking and for the Council to ensure that digital technologies enable our Members and staff to work more productively and efficiently and adopt a "digital first" mentality.

The strategy is presented across 3 themes:

- **Theme 1 – Smart People**

- **Theme 2 – Smart Place**

- **Theme 3 – Smart Council**

As a consequence of delivering this strategy we will:

- Empower Woking residents and businesses to request, access and receive Council services
- Work with partners to provide faster broadband connectivity across the Borough
- Reduce digital exclusivity
- Explore a Digital Platform to access all Council, partner and stakeholder services
- Invest in a wider enhanced digital public realm
- Introduce "smart" technology solutions that will help reduce energy consumption and lower emissions
- Provide access to digital training
- Encourage businesses to start-up and grow and be more competitive
- Support 5G and full fibre rollouts
- Introduce a Digital Centre of Excellence incorporating a "green tech" incubator hub
- Support the aspirations of our Climate Change Strategy
- Introduce a Digital First mindset, championed by Members and Senior Officers
- Review programmes, projects, workflows, systems, processes and procedures
- Ensure Council systems are protected from malicious cyber-attacks and adopt 5 digital principles.

An action plan will be developed to implement the strategy.

The strategy was considered by the Economic Development Task Group at its meeting on 4 November 2021. A 4-week consultation process has been undertaken and was generally supported.

Recommendations

The Executive is requested to:

RECOMMEND TO COUNCIL That

the Digital Strategy 2022-2025, as attached to the report, be approved.

Reasons for Decision

Reason: The priorities identified in the Digital Strategy 2022-2025 will positively impact and support Woking's businesses, residents and its wider community.

The item(s) above will need to be dealt with by way of a recommendation to Council.

Background Papers: None.

Reporting Person: Giorgio Framalicco, Director of Planning
Email: giorgio.framalicco@woking.gov.uk, Extn: 3440

Contact Person: Chris Norrington, Business Liaison Manager
Email: chris.norrington@woking.gov.uk, Extn: 3900

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Kevin Davis
Email: cllrkevin.davis@woking.gov.uk

Shadow Portfolio Holder: Councillor Ian Johnson
Email: cllrian.johnson@woking.gov.uk

Date Published: 10 November 2021

1.0 Introduction

1.1 The UK's Digital Strategy, which is part of its Industrial Strategy, sets out key principles which can be adopted in Woking. These include investing in infrastructure, giving access to digital skills, making the UK the best place to start and grow a business, all businesses becoming digital businesses, and a leader in serving its citizens online.

1.2 Aligning Woking Borough Council's digital strategy with both regional and national strategies will enable investment locally, de-risk duplication and forms a key part of a wider UK geographical digital agenda.

1.3 Having a collaborative approach to digital infrastructure, inclusion, architecture, services and products, driven, enabled and empowered by the Council will ensure that our residents, businesses and visitors receive cutting edge technology which will benefit the community in which they operate. The Council cannot achieve its digital ambitions alone, it needs strong and effective partnerships to develop a shared vision.

1.4 This strategy sets out the Council's vision on how residents, businesses, and the wider community interacts with the Council in order to request, access and receive services. To meet these changing expectations the Council must enhance and expand its digital offer.

1.5 The Digital Strategy is attached as Appendix 1

2.0 Digital Themes

2.1 Theme 1: Smart People

We will help the people of Woking get the most out of digital technologies in their homes and communities, helping to improve the health and wellbeing of our residents and visitors and enrich their lives.

Empower Residents to use our services digitally.

Help excluded parts of society to become digitally included.

Seek to introduce a Digital Platform.

Increase broadband speeds for residents.

2.2 Theme 2: Smart Place

We will unlock the Borough using smart technologies and give the Borough's businesses and residents a competitive edge through digital infrastructure and advanced connectivity, promoting the Borough as an enterprising, vibrant and sustainable Borough with a strong, growing digital economy.

- Support 5G rollout.
- Promote the Borough as a digital place to live, work, play and learn.
- Grow the technology community to attract more technology companies to the borough
- Develop Woking as a "Smart Borough".
- Safeguard our high streets – working with technology to remain relevant.
- Seek to introduce a Digital Centre of Excellence supporting a "green tech" incubator hub.
- Seek initiatives to make the Borough a safer place to work and live.
- By using digital technologies, support the aspirations of The Council's Climate Change Strategy.

2.3   Smart Council

We will optimise how the Council uses digital to work smarter: more efficiently, more productively, to innovate and collaborate, to adapt and make informed decisions.

- Introduce "Digital First" as a concept.
- Review programmes, projects, workflows, systems and procedures to understand where efficiencies can be made.
- Ensure our systems are not susceptible to malicious cyber-attacks.
- To adopt 5 Digital Principles.

3.0   Smart Future

3.1   A detailed action plan will be produced in order to realise the ambition set out in the strategy. A series of performance measures have been set out to assist. Although the strategy itself doesn't have any cost implications, the action plan will identify costs, external funding and private sector investment.

4.0   Corporate Strategy

4.1   People - A healthy, inclusive and engaged community – Theme 1 of the digital strategy seeks to empower residents to access all Council services digitally, to reduce digital inequality and to improve health and safety through digital initiatives.

4.2   Place – An enterprising, vibrant and sustainable borough – Theme 2 identifies digital technologies to ensure that the Council creates a strong and vibrant economic hub, supporting businesses to grow and remain competitive, to nurture start-ups, and the enables further digital infrastructure investment to attract more businesses.

4.3   Us – An innovative, proactive and effective Council – Theme 3 addresses the concept of Digital First, especially in modernising working practices. Digital First as a concept flows through each theme. Digital innovations, investment in infrastructure and external funding will be attributed to the strengths of our partnership working. The forthcoming business review will include recommendations for digital technologies to be used to deliver best value for taxpayers. Finally digital resources will be provided to ensure that staff are equipped to perform their roles.

5.0   Implications

Finance and Risk

5.1   The Digital Strategy provides clear direction and focus with respect to its objectives upon which future financial decisions can be based.

5.2   The strategy itself does not have any associated financial risks. The forthcoming action plan will identify required expenditure and any internal funding requirements will be identified and approved via the Council's normal approval procedures.

Equalities and Human Resources

5.3   The Digital Strategy reflects the Council's ambitions to promote equality and address inequalities in Woking. An Equalities Impact Assessment will be completed alongside the forthcoming Action Plan.

5.4   The Digital Strategy will support staff in understanding the strategic direction of the Council's vision for technology to improve procedures, practises, projects and workflows. Members and Staff will continue to be consulted.

<u>Legal</u>

5.5   Legal Services have been consulted and have not raised any issues.

6.0   Engagement and Consultation

6.1   The strategy has been developed in consultation with Members, staff, residents, the business community, partners and stakeholders. Appendix 2 is a summary of the feedback received.

6.2   The strategy was also considered by the Economic Development Task Group at its meeting on 4 November 2021.

6.3   The Community Forum asked whether there was agreement with the strategic themes, the results were as follows:

Survey Participants	
A Woking Borough based business	27%
An organisation representing businesses	12%
A Woking Borough resident	4%
Other (did not provide status information)	58%

How strongly do you agree or disagree with the proposals in Theme 1?	
Agree	77%
Disagree	23%

How strongly do you agree or disagree with the proposals in Theme 2?	
Agree	88%
Disagree	22%

How strongly do you agree or disagree with the proposals in Theme 3?	
Agree	88%
Disagree	22%

REPORT ENDS