Audit and Scrutiny Committee
18 July 2023

IT STRATEGY

Head of Service:	Chris Anderson, Head of IT
Wards affected:	(All Wards);
Urgent Decision?(yes/no)	No
If yes, reason urgent decision required:	
Appendices (attached):	Appendix 1 – Draft - Information Technology Strategy 2023
	Appendix 2 – Draft - Information Technology Roadmap 2023 - 2024

Summary

This report provides details of the Epsom & Ewell Borough Council Information Technology Strategy for 2023 and beyond. The IT Strategy defines the principles, governance, standards and methodology by which the council will source, procure, implement, maintain and deliver IT services both internally (to staff and partners) and externally (to residents). This report details also a high-level IT Roadmap for 2023-2024.

Delivery of the IT Roadmap workstreams and projects will provide Members/Officers with improved ways of working that increases collaboration and reduces the requirement for physical servers and infrastructure located at Council premises.

The IT Strategy and IT Roadmap are still both in development and require further work to fully define and cost the work programme.

Recommendation (s)

The Committee is asked to:

(1) **Agree the draft IT Strategy and the associated plan to invest in a programme of works as set out in the draft IT Roadmap. The works to include; a refresh of end user devices for councillors and officers, a programme of works to update infrastructure, and transformational projects to improve and increase online services to residents.**

(2) **Approve the indicative funding implications for delivering the defined IT Roadmap in 2023-2024 as set out in table 1 of this report, these being; the carry forward of unspent 2022/23 capital funding of £215k and new capital funding for 2023/24 of £225k (which is inclusive of an additional £15k in order to complete the Member device refresh).**

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> **(3)** **Agree that a revised and more detailed IT Strategy and IT Roadmap will be submitted to committee later in 2023. This will seek further approval for the projected costs for IT services 2024-2027.**

1 Reason for Recommendation

1.1 Strategy and Resources Committee approved the ICT Programme of Works capital funding for 2022-2023 on 29th March 2022. Subsequently, there has been a significant period of change within the IT team and an external review of the IT Strategy.

1.2 The external IT Strategic Review, and subsequent work undertaken by the recently appointed Head of IT, has resulted in greater clarity regarding the current and future IT service provision and the outcomes desired by councillors and officers. These include significant improvement to the end-user experience and Member/Officer digital skills, a continuing rationalisation of the council's application portfolio and improved online resident facing services.

1.3 The IT Strategy and accompanying IT Roadmap are the first steps in defining the path from our current "as is" to our desired "to be" state.

1.4 Key aspects of the IT Strategy include increased use of cloud services and potential leasing of end user devices, both of which will result in a shift from capital funding to revenue costs.

1.5 Further work is required to fully define the IT Strategy, IT Roadmap and the detailed stabilising, enabling and improvement projects which are expected to take a number of years and require capital funding to complete. Consequently, short-term funding of the IT Service through 2023/24 is indicative only and longer-term funding is yet to be defined.

2 Background

2.1 IT services within EEBC have grown organically over many years. This has resulted in systems and infrastructure which have become overly complex and difficult to maintain, and which are perceived by users as slow and difficult to use.

2.2 An ICT Programme of Works (2019-2022) was implemented, consisting of a number of workstreams intended to update or replace existing systems and provide an improvement in IT/business alignment, the end user experience, efficiency and overall user satisfaction.

2.3 Whilst a number of these projects completed successfully (Civica Cloud migration, CRM Phase 1), others were either only partially completed or were not progressed at all. The reasons for this are manyfold, however the impact of Covid (both in terms of the direct impact on staff and on the availability of external resources, services and hardware required to deliver projects) and issues of high-staff turnover were major contributing factors.

2.4 From April-June 2022 an IT Strategic Review was undertaken. This provided a useful insight into the state of EEBC's IT services including internal capability, capacity, and the historical and current challenges facing the service. The review also set out the goals and requirements of the future service as defined by Councillors and officers.

2.5 Subsequent to the review, there has been a further period of instability whilst a new Head of Information Technology was recruited and appointed (January 2023). This appointment has however afforded the opportunity for the IT Management Team and Senior Management Team to reconsider the IT Strategy afresh.

2.6 Whilst the external IT Strategic Review conducted in 2022 has remained the primary source of information, a further series of engagements with a number of Councillors, all Heads of Service (a number of who were not in post or unable to contribute at the time of the review), end users, and consideration of the council's accommodation strategy (only available since the IT Strategic Review) has resulted in what we believe is a clearer, more defined IT Strategy. Although it is acknowledged that there is still significant work required to complete it.

3 IT Strategy 2023

3.1 The IT Strategy (see appendix 1) defines the principles, governance, standards and methodology by which the council will source, procure, implement, maintain and deliver IT services both internally (to staff and partners) and externally (to residents).

3.2 The IT Strategy builds on the outputs of the IT Strategic Review (2022), states the defined goals and service requirements and links them to an IT Roadmap which details the work required to achieve them. Notably, the revised IT Strategy clearly defines the governance and controls which will be implemented to ensure delivery is achievable and goals are met.

3.3 There has been limited time since appointment (January 2023) for the Head of IT to create the revised IT Strategy and the accompanying IT Roadmap, with both still a work in progress. Work on them will continue with the output being that all projects will be reviewed and baselined, thus ensuring that they are fully aligned to the IT Strategy and clearly defined, documented, resourced and funded.

3.4 Whilst many of the projects required to deliver the IT Strategy will be familiar, a significant change is proposed to the way in which we deliver the desktop service to officers and the devices they use.

3.5 As noted in the IT Strategic Review, the current End User Experience (delivered through a Citrix desktop) is widely considered to be poor, with most staff finding it slow and difficult to use. Excessive time taken to load the desktop, it's failure to fully integrate with Microsoft Teams, poor support for video, and our use of thin-client devices (which are tied to the desk) mean that in an organisation aiming to become increasingly mobile and connected Citrix and Thin-clients are no longer fit for purpose.

3.6 To address this our strategy is to refresh the desktop hardware and provide secure, corporate laptops as our default end user device[1]. This, in conjunction with Microsoft 365 and Teams, will provide staff with a consistent end user experience, enable collaboration and increase productivity. In tandem with the laptop refresh older monitors (often deployed in pairs) will be retired and replaced with monitors sized appropriately to the work being undertaken[2].

3.7 In conjunction with the deployment of a new secure desktop, work will be undertaken to improve WiFi coverage, increase network bandwidth[3], and implement supporting technology and services such as secure, always-on, virtual private network (vpn) technologies.

3.8 Changes to end user devices will be phased, with those using only Microsoft 365 and browser based Cloud services prioritised. User training and education will be a key to gaining optimal benefit from this change in technology.

3.9 Devices issued to councillors were similarly identified in the IT Strategic Review as being sub-optimal. This was reiterated during introductory meetings between councillors and the new Head of IT, although there was no consensus amongst councillors on a single, preferred device. Given the current age of the devices issued to councillors a device refresh is now due. It is therefore proposed that councillors be given a choice of device (either a laptop or an iPad) and that these be issued to councillors post-election in May 2023.

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[1] Work will be undertaken to document the different user personas and to agree with Heads of Service a selection of supportable devices appropriate to business requirements.

[2] Eg: Planners working on large format plans may benefit from larger 40"-49" monitors. Energy efficiency of monitors will be reviewed in line with corporate climate change action plan.

[3] Existing Town Hall network and WiFi infrastructure is end of life and in need of replacement. All equipment will be specified such that it can be utilised as part of our developing corporate accommodation strategy.

3.10 Capital funding of £250k has previously been agreed (Strategy & Resources Committee, 29th March 2022) to complete a number of improvement and replacement projects including the website (which is due to become obsolete in November 2023), Revenues & Benefits Document Management System (end of life) and network infrastructure (end of life). Of this amount, £215k is forecast to remain unspent at year-end (31 March 2023). It is requested therefore that the unspent balance be carried forward into the 2023/24 financial year to complete these projects.

3.11 In addition to carrying forward the unspent 2022/23 balance, new Capital funding of £225k is sought for the coming financial year (2023/24). This will allow key improvement works outlined within the draft IT Roadmap to progress whilst detailed work is undertaken to inform on the longer-term costs arising from the revised IT Strategy. Table 1 below sets out agreed, known and indicative costs.

3.12 At this time, no additional revenue costs have been identified. This will undoubtedly change as the strategy progresses and will be covered in the September update report.

3.13 Separate Capital funding of £556k has previously been agreed for the corporate CRM project. Of this, £191k has been spend to date with £365k remaining.

Financial Year	IT Capital Programme	CRM Replacement Programme
2022/23	£215,000	£165,000
2023/24	£225,000	£100,000
2024/25	tbc	£100,000
Total	tbc	£365,000

Table 1: Indicative capital programme costs 2023-2025

3.14 Delivery of the IT Strategy is anticipated to require an increased investment in IT. Initially this will be a call on capital funds however, over time with increasing use of consumption-based cloud services there will be a shift to revenue expenditure.

3.15 Whilst savings will be achieved through simplification of the infrastructure and applications estate, it is anticipated that overall costs for IT are likely to rise as a result of increased use of IT services by business functions, adoption of new technologies, and the ever-increasing requirement to combat cyber threats.

4   Risk Assessment

Legal or other duties

4.1   Equality Impact Assessment

- Procurement of IT goods and services will follow the Council's Contract Standing Orders.

4.2   Crime & Disorder

- None for the purposes of this report.

4.3   Safeguarding

- None for the purposes of this report.

4.4   Dependencies

- None for the purposes of this report.

4.5   Other

- None

5   Financial Implications

5.1   The proposed capital budget implications are detailed at Table 1.

5.2   Funding has previously been agreed and is therefore already in place for the 2022/23 budget requirement of £215,000 and the CRM Replacement Project budget requirement of £365,000.

5.3   For the new £225,000 budget request for 2023/24, it is proposed to fund this from the Council's budgeted £500,000 revenue contribution to capital schemes.

5.4   Longer-term beyond 2023/24, should there be a reduction as expected in the IT capital funding requirement but an increase in revenue funding requirement, consideration can be given at a later date to re-purposing a proportion of the budgeted revenue contribution to capital to meet this requirement.

5.5   While re-purposing a portion of the Council's budgeted revenue contribution to capital would reduce funds available to invest in other capital projects, this would be mitigated if the requirement for IT capital expenditure reduces in the longer term.

5.6 **Section 151 Officer's comments**: Work should continue to develop the more detailed IT Strategy and to identify its longer-term capital and revenue budget implications. Funding for both revenue and capital implications will need to be identified upon presenting the final strategy for approval, to ensure any proposals agreed by members are financially deliverable.

6 Legal Implications

6.1 **Legal Officer's comments**: There are no direct legal implications arising from the contents of this report.

7 Policies, Plans & Partnerships

7.1 **Council's Key Priorities**: The following Key Priorities are engaged:

Effective Council - Improve access to services through technology.
Smart & Connected – Increase digital connectivity for all.

7.2 **Service Plans**: The ICT Roadmap underpins the current Service Delivery Plan.

7.3 **Climate & Environmental Impact of recommendations**:

The revised IT Strategy and IT Roadmap support the Climate Change Action Plan as follows:-

Theme 6: Use of technology and information systems.

- reduce the need to travel to meetings (action 53),
- support a change in working practices, improved digital skills, and reduced use of print/paper (action 55),
- support a reduction in on-premise infrastructure and the move to Cloud services (action 58).

Theme 2: Council Building & Energy Use.

- a reduction in accommodation required for staff and on-premise infrastructure will support reduced energy consumption (action 17)

7.4 **Sustainability Policy & Community Safety Implications**:

None for the purposes of this report.

7.5 **Partnerships**:

None for the purposes of this report.

8   Background papers

8.1   The documents referred to in compiling this report are as follows:

Previous reports:

- ICT Programme of Works – 29 March 2022

Other papers:

- None