

24 March 2016

ITEM: 7

Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Digital Council Programme – Progress Update

Wards and communities affected:

All

Key Decision:

Key

Report of: Jackie Hinchliffe

Accountable Director: Jackie Hinchliffe, Director of HR, OD and Transformation

This report is Public

Executive Summary

As part of its Transformation Programme the Council aspires to be a ‘Digital Council’. The overarching aim is to make Thurrock ‘Digital by Default’, developing services that both:

Allow straightforward access to information and services in times and in ways that are convenient to the users rather than the providers

...and are more efficient and cost effective to develop and run.

This is underpinned by ten ‘Digital Principles’ and based on the following ambition:

- Enable our customers to do more.
- Increase the effectiveness of our professional staff.
- Improve management information.

To support this vision, in September 2014, Cabinet agreed the ambitious and innovative Digital Council Programme. The scope was extended further in February 2015 to include additional initiatives.

Work to deliver the Council’s Digital aspiration is progressing well. The programme has delivered early successes with residents now able to transact and access many of the Council’s high volume services online 24/7 via their PC, mobile device or smart phone.

Other projects are in progress and on track to deliver significant benefits to residents and families, supporting earlier, better targeted intervention, deliver improved outcomes and manage down future demand for higher cost, more intrusive interventions (such as children being taken into care) whilst delivering broader long-term community wide benefits.

The programme is predicated on an ‘invest to save’ principle, encouraging customers to interact with the Council through the lowest cost channels and ensuring our processes and systems are streamlined and provide the most efficient service at the lowest possible cost, with customers having the option to be informed of progress throughout.

The Thurrock approach ensures those who are unable to access services online are not disadvantaged and that face to face and telephony channels are targeted at these customers.

To date, the Programme has delivered significant achievements, now providing a best practice website and a wide range of easily accessible online services with increasing customer take-up. The Council is also at the leading edge of Local Government in a number of innovative and emerging areas that have the potential to deliver significant savings whilst delivering improved outcomes for those individuals and families who most need our services.

The Programme is progressing well and is on target to deliver agreed outcomes within budget.

1 Recommendations

- 1.1 To note and comment on the content and progress of the Digital Council Programme.
- 1.2 Members consider how to support and promote the Channel Migration Strategy.
- 1.3 Members sign up for ‘MyAccount’ at www.thurrock.gov.uk/myaccount and encourage residents to create an account to access services online.

2 Introduction and Background

- 2.1 In September 2014, Cabinet agreed the Digital Council Business Case. This outlined three programmes of work to deliver the Council’s ambition to become a ‘Digital Council’, building on the previous work undertaken through the Thurrock Online and IT Connects programmes.

Enable our customers to do more...	Increase the effectiveness of our professional staff...	Improve management information...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increasing self reliance • Supporting ‘local’ access • Maximising digital and automated solutions to drive self serve and efficiency • Gathering customer insight to understand user needs and demands 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enabling cost reduction • Increasing individual efficiency and control • Increasing cross team , cross directorate and cross agency work • Focusing redesign delivery around strategic themes • Developing new models of delivery 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Managing our cost reduction targets • Increasing our focus on information analysis, benchmarking and best practice • Understanding the totality of our relationship with customers and businesses • Using information to shape future services

- 2.2 The Digital Council Business Case identified a series of projects required to deliver these programmes and Cabinet approved a budget of £1.7m, with an estimated £2.2m savings to be delivered by services as a result of increased efficiencies delivered by the programme.

- 2.3 In February 2015, Cabinet agreed to recommend to full Council further capital funding for additional projects within the Digital Council programme totalling £2.3m.
- 2.4 This ambitious programme commenced in 2014/15 and will be delivered over three years.

3 Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

- 3.1 The sections below provide a summary of the work that has been progressed to date and next steps for the programme.
- 3.2 The digital world is evolving rapidly with new technologies and solutions continually emerging. The programme must be flexible enough to adapt to this, whilst ensuring strong governance and decisions that deliver the Council's vision and strategic priorities.
- 3.3 Consequently, as the programme progresses, it will be necessary to review initiatives to maximise the return on investment and optimise the customer experience.

4 Programme 1: Moving More Transactions Online

Thurrock Online

- 4.1 The Thurrock Online project has provided a web based information and transaction website that enables residents to create 'MyAccount' and provides access to a wide range of information, advice and guidance about Council services with 24/7 access via any PC, smart phone or mobile device.
- 4.2 With an average of over 1,300 MyAccount registrations per month, the Council is now on target to sign up over 30,000 customers on MyAccount by the end of March 2016. Appendix 1 provides a summary showing the current take-up of online services.
- 4.3 The website also provides access to the most common / highest volume transactions, on the web and on a smart phone residents can:
- Report environmental issues.
 - Access their Council Tax account.
 - Access Housing Benefits details.
 - Book an appointment with registrars.
 - Apply and bid for Council Housing.
 - Request and pay for a bulky waste collection.
 - Apply for school places.
 - Make library reservations and renewals.
 - Track planning applications.
 - Comment on current consultations.
 - Report street lighting faults
 - Report potholes

4.4 Work is underway to make the following additional services available online:

- Building Control.
- Licensing applications (Taxis / Premises / Temporary event notices etc).
- Parking Permits.
- Highways licensing (skip / hoarding and materials permits).
- Blue Badges.
- Planning payments.
- Extended payment facilities for other Council services.
- eBilling - Replacing paper Council Tax bills with online bills.
- eNotifications - Replacing Housing Benefits letters with online information.
- Single View of Debt - a customer summary of all their Council debts.

Channel Migration

4.5 The way in which the Council's customers want to access services is changing. People who routinely buy services and goods over the internet and by phone, and who communicate via text messaging, Facebook and Twitter increasingly expect the same flexibility when accessing public services.

4.6 A Channel Migration Strategy has been agreed that drives self-service where possible and appropriate and will also deliver the return on investment that the council has made in the Digital platform.

4.7 The strategy reflects the need to target increasingly limited resources to those with the most complex needs and proposes that for most residents, the first point of contact will be online channels.

4.8 The Channel Migration Strategy also incorporates:

- The **Digital Inclusion Strategy** to ensure that customers who do not have access to digital channels at home or work are not disadvantaged when interacting with the Council.
- The **Accessibility Strategy** to provide a full range of contact channels for each of our services and enhance access for customers with special and complex requirements.

4.9 The Society of IT Manager's (SOCITM) Channel Value Benchmarking survey underlines how wide the cost gap can be. It estimates a cost of £8.15 per face-to-face visit, £2.59 per phone call and £0.11 per visit to a council website. As residents switch to online channels it will be possible to scale back others without degrading the customer experience.

4.10 Work will also be initiated to provide a live 'web chat' facility so that customers using the website can 'talk' to the Council with 'instant messaging', and to implement electronic forms with built in data validation so minimising rekeying of information.

Customer Feedback

- 4.11 In parallel with deploying online services, a web survey has also been implemented to gather customer feedback regarding the Council's website and online services. This will help drive further improvement and refinement of our online offer.
- 4.12 The feedback function is provided on the information pages of www.thurrock.gov.uk. In the first 4 months since its launch in October 2015, there were 265 submissions. Of these, 136 were positive and 129 negative. Negative feedback has already been used to improve the website – for example, adding several items previously unlisted in the A to Z of waste and recyclable items; adding travel directions and a map for Thameside Theatre; using simpler language on school calendar pages; adding links to children's social care threshold documents; and clarifying how to renew resident Dart-Tags for crossing the QEII bridge.
- 4.13 A user Test Panel has also been established to ensure that the online services provided by the council are easy to access and use. Feedback from the Test Panel will be used to further refine and develop the website.

Data Analytics – Children's Safeguarding Predictive Model

- 4.14 The Council is participating in a leading edge project to build a predictive model that will identify children in the 0 to 2 age range who are most at risk of maltreatment by age five and are not currently known to the Council as high risk cases. The model will also analyse historic data to evaluate the effectiveness of interventions in specific scenarios.
- 4.15 This approach will not remove the need for trained professionals, but will provide them with summarised data, in one place, to support their decision making. Intervening at an earlier stage, with the most effective intervention, will avoid later, higher cost, crisis interventions thus reducing total service costs, providing a better outcome for the families involved and reducing costs and impacts down-stream on the wider community such as ASB, Police custody and health issues.
- 4.16 The predictive model is now being built and the first outputs will be provided to the Council in Spring 2016.
- 4.17 Future stages of the project will engage with the Council's partners (Health / Police / Third Sector) to include a wider set of data in the model to improve its predictive accuracy and provide wider benefits.

Data Analytics - Phase 2

- 4.18 Initial discussions are also underway to consider other applications for data analytics to enable demand management through early intervention and prevention. Initial candidate areas for consideration include Frail and Elderly and Domestic Violence.

5 Programme 2: Online Assessment and Decisions

Adult Services – Information, Advice, Guidance and Assessment Portal

- 5.1 The Council has implemented a user friendly Information, Advice and Guidance website for Adult Services to meet the requirements of the 2014 Care Act.
- 5.2 In addition to providing 24/7 access to information, the website also includes a 'Resource Allocation System'. This is an assessment system that, through a simple to use survey, asks the user a range of questions about their current situation, including their mobility and ability to look after themselves and their financial status. Based on the response, an initial automated assessment will advise whether the individual could be entitled to Council funding and will provide an indicative value.
- 5.3 During development, the website was tested with the Thurrock diversity network to ensure the site was easily understood and accessible to its target audience.
- 5.4 This is currently live and being tested by officers, but is not yet publically available to residents. Following further thorough testing, to ensure the accuracy of budgets calculated by the system, this functionality will be made available to the public in Spring 2016.
- 5.5 Research suggests that when self-assessing their personal needs, service users tend to specify lower requirements than if a professional undertakes the assessment.
- 5.6 Where the self-assessment process concludes that the user is not entitled to Council funding, this will reduce avoidable contact and deliver efficiencies as officer time is not incurred in undertaking unsuccessful assessments.

Council-Wide - Information, Advice, Guidance and Assessment Portal

- 5.7 The Digital Council business case proposed that the web based Information, Advice, Guidance and Assessment functionality described above potentially has a wider application across a broader range of Council services.
- 5.8 However, most services already have an established web based information, advice and guidance facility and the cost of adopting a standardised approach across all services cannot be justified given the significant cost and relatively minor benefits. It has therefore been agreed this project will not be progressed.

6 Programme 3: Document and Information Management

Digital Documents

- 6.1 The Digital Documents project involves the implementation of a Council-wide Electronic Document and Record Management System (EDRMS). This supports the elimination of paper records and enables officers to retrieve

records regardless of the location where they are working. This has also helped the Council rationalise its use of admin buildings.

- 6.2 The project has identified that 30% of current electronic file storage relates to duplicated files. The EDRMS project will enable this duplication to be eliminated and provides a 'Google quality' search function to quickly find files. In some areas this will also enable existing file referencing databases to be retired.
- 6.3 The EDRMS improves compliance with Data Protection legislation and ensures retention of documents is in accordance with the statutory requirements for each individual service.
- 6.4 Implementation and training across the Council is now over 80% complete and the significant task of cleansing and migrating 9.3 million files to the new system is underway and will be complete in late 2016.

Digital Documents Phase 2 – Integration and Workflow

- 6.5 The next phase of the Digital Documents project is currently being developed and will involve linking existing business systems with the EDRMS. This will deliver efficiencies by providing seamless access to documents through the business systems that officers use in their day to day work.

Adult Services eMarketPlace

- 6.6 The Digital Council business case proposed the implementation of an eMarketPlace solution for Adult Services.
- 6.7 This functionality is closely linked to the Adults assessment tool described above. It was envisaged that after a resident undertakes a self-assessment, the eMarketPlace would enable them to use their personal budget from the Council to buy appropriate goods / services from approved Council suppliers and third sector partners.
- 6.8 Alternatively, the eMarketPlace could provide self-funders with access to approved Council suppliers at discounted rates, encouraging self-funders to take appropriate, preventative action and delay / defer escalation of their conditions.
- 6.9 Initial research has been undertaken to assess the feasibility of implementing an Adults eMarketPlace and further work will now be progressed by Adult Services to ascertain whether there is a valid business case for progressing this option.

Oracle / Business Intelligence / MI Dashboard

- 6.10 A programme was established in 2011 to upgrade Oracle Finance, and implement an Oracle HR/Payroll and Procurement solution and introduce Business Intelligence capabilities to provide Managers with high level, dashboard style, and summary management information reporting of their key business metrics.
- 6.11 The solution also provided for manager and employee self-service as an enabler for delivering efficiency savings and improved processes managed through built-in workflows.

- 6.12 The implementation of Business Intelligence has not yet been delivered and the Council remains heavily reliant on manual workarounds and manipulation of data in spreadsheets to provide monthly reporting.
- 6.13 This project aims to address this issue and configure the Oracle solution so it is fit for purpose and underpinned with effective, best practice, processes.
- 6.14 This work commenced in late 2014, but has been delayed due to the transition of ICT from Serco back into the Council. Work to progress this initiative recommenced in December 2015.

7 Next Steps

- 7.1 The Digital Programme will continue to form a key component of the Council's modernisation agenda and further programmes and projects will be defined at a future date. One element of the next phase is to realise the tangible benefits of the investment and deliver cashable savings to contribute to the financial challenges facing the council.

8 Governance and the Digital Board

- 8.1 The Digital Board is responsible for the overall governance of the Digital Council programme. It provides leadership, direction, reviews progress and is responsible for strategic decisions.
- 8.2 The Digital Board meets monthly to review the progress of projects within scope and address any issues that have been escalated for resolution by Project Managers.
- 8.3 The Digital Board is Chaired by a Council Director and its membership comprises of senior representatives from each Directorate and ICT.
- 8.4 Responsibility for delivering each project is delegated to specific Project Managers and progress / issues are tracked and monitored through individual project boards.

9 Reasons for Recommendation

- 9.1 To provide members with the opportunity to comment on the Digital Council Programme.
- 9.2 To enable members to actively engage with the Digital Council Programme and support the channel shift strategy.

10 Implications

- 10.1 Financial

Implications verified by: Carl Tomlinson
Finance Manager

The capital budget for Transformation as per the Q3 Capital Monitoring report presented to March Cabinet is £11.272m. This covers 2015/16 and 2016/17 and includes £4.6m funding for the Digital and ICT Programme. Allocations will be reviewed in 2016/17 with a view to ensuring appropriate alignment with requirements. The Programme is based on an invest to save principle with corresponding savings supporting the councils financial position going forward.

10.2 Legal

Implications verified by: Chris Pickering
Principal Solicitor

There are few direct legal implications contained within the scope of the proposed programme and these are being addressed individually as appropriate for each project.

The Data Analytics Project has required significant work to ensure legal compliance with the Data Protection Act.

The project to implement the Adults Information, Advice, Guidance and Assessment Portal was designed to address the needs of regulatory change, including the Care Act 2014.

The Digital Documents project will improve the Council's compliance with the Data Protection Act ensuring that information is not kept beyond its statutory retention period.

10.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: Natalie Warren
Community Development Manager

The digital programme will impact on most Thurrock residents. It is imperative that the activities within the programme are designed with a full understanding of the diversity of users' needs and requirements. Where appropriate, before each of the projects in the programme are initiated, detailed equality impact assessments are undertaken and their outputs designed into service solutions.

10.4 Other implications

None considered significant.

11 **Background papers used in preparing the report (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):**

None

12 Appendices to the report

Appendix 1: Resident Take-Up of Digital Services

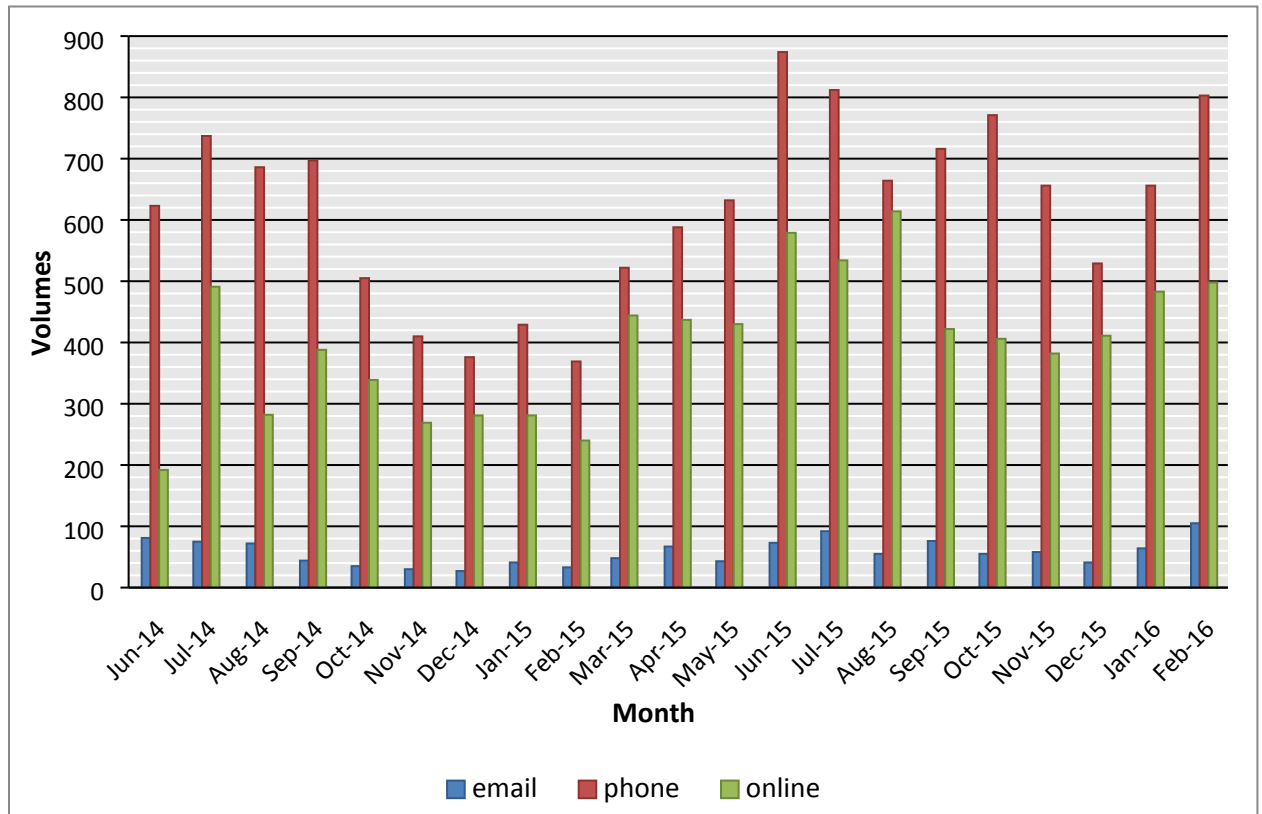
Report Author:

Nick Coldicott

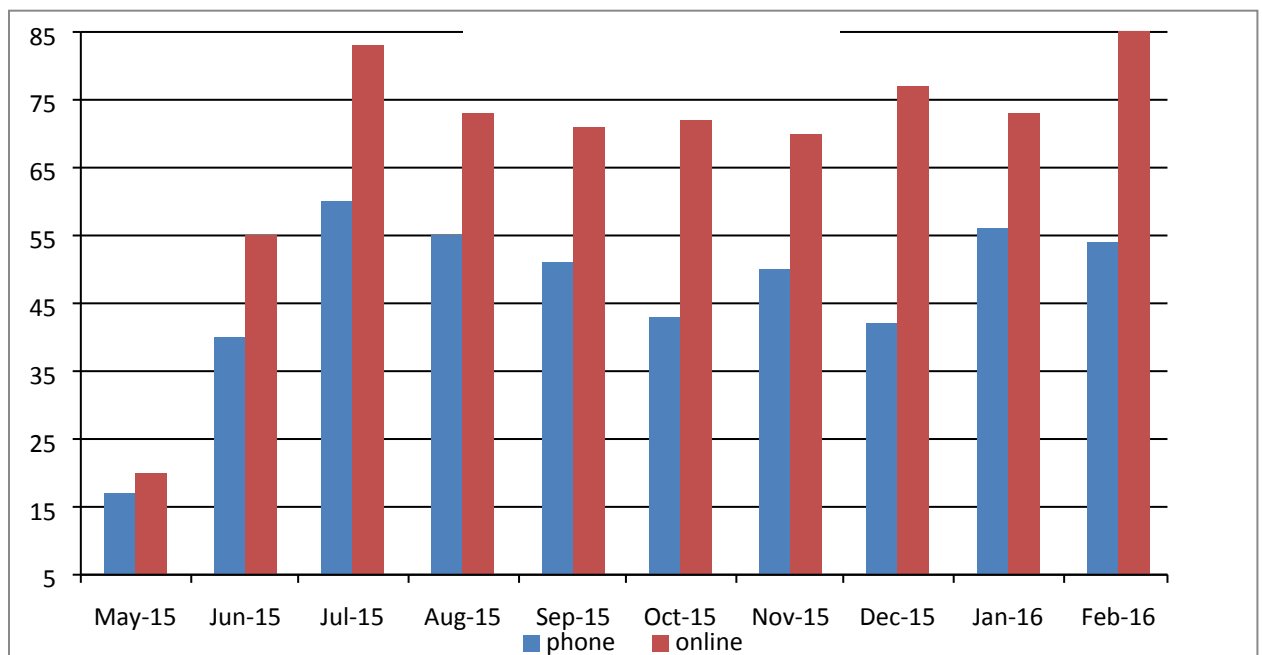
Digital Council – Programme Manager, Transformation Team

Resident Take-Up of Digital Services

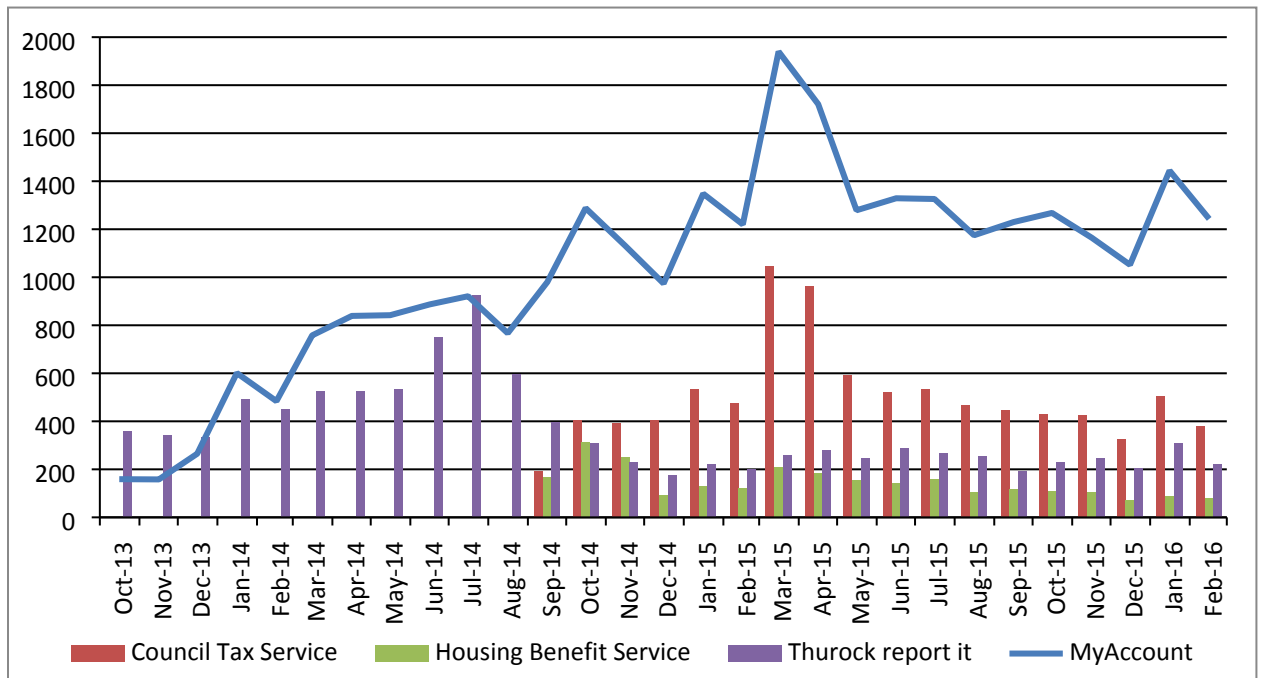
Environmental Reporting (Report It)



Bulky Waste Bookings



My Account monthly 'sign up' and 'registration' for secure services



My Account Activity for key transactions

