

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (REGULATORY,
COMPLIANCE AND CORPORATE SERVICES)**



**MEETING HELD AT THE ASSEMBLY HALL, TOWN HALL BOOTLE
ON MONDAY 20TH JANUARY, 2025**

PRESENT: Councillor Bradshaw (in the Chair)
Councillor Byrom (Vice-Chair)
Councillors Evans, Murphy, Catie Page, Parker,
Shaw and Thomas

31. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors McNabb and Sir Ron Watson.

32. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of any disclosable pecuniary interests or personal interests were received.

33. DIGITAL STRATEGY

The Committee considered the report of the Executive Director of Corporate Services and Commercial that sought the consideration of, and the submission of views to the Cabinet and Council, on the proposed Digital Strategy (the Strategy).

The report indicated that Sefton published its first Digital Strategy in 2021 and that since its launch the Council had achieved a great deal, including the deployment of Cloud Services, and a new Customer Experience Platform and a redesigned website; the pace of change in relation to digital continued to be significant and that such changes had not only changed customer expectations but had also provided opportunities for Sefton to transform the way that services were delivered and in turn, how residents were supported; and that the revised Digital Strategy for Sefton over the next three years was intended to be an overarching plan that articulated the council's ambitions and was based on key priorities identified within the Corporate Plan.

The report detailed that the Strategy was split into the following five themes:

- Developing Sefton as a Digital Place
- Create Strong Digital Foundations
- Supporting an enhanced Customer Journey
- To develop our Data and Intelligence
- Support the Workforce of the Future

and that each of the themes had priorities within them which sought to:

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- Ensure that residents and businesses were enabled to take advantage of the opportunities afforded by digital technologies
- Ensure Sefton had the core infrastructure and associated services in place to maximise the opportunities afforded by digital, including capitalising on existing investments to ensure value for money
- Make sure that all residents could access services via a method most convenient for their needs
- Empower Council staff to transform data into intelligence by equipping them with the digital tools, skills, and training that they needed to make better use of the information and data collected to inform the delivery of core services and the ambitions within the Corporate Strategy
- Support staff to achieve their full potential and deliver great outcomes for the residents of the Sefton

The report also detailed that over Summer 2024 public consultation took place on the proposed Strategy, with most respondents agreeing with the core themes and issues identified and a summary of the consultation feedback along with the Council's responses to issues raised was attached to the report as Appendix C of this document.

The report concluded that over the next three years the delivery of the Strategy would be reflected in the development of key programmes of work and associated governance structures; that the progress and impact of the strategy would be driven through a programme boards, that would be accountable for the delivery of the key priorities and projects documented with the Strategy; that regular updates on delivery would be provided directly to the Executive Leadership Team; and that an annual report on the delivery would also be provided to this Committee alongside the Annual ICT report.

Attached as appendices to the report were:

Appendix A - Sefton's Digital Strategy

Appendix B - Sefton's Digital Strategy Easy Read Version

Appendix C - Digital Strategy, Consultation Comments and Council Responses from the Questionnaire

Members of the Committee raised a concern at how AI could summarise a Council document and produce misleading results; and assurance was sought about what safeguards could be put in place to stop this from happening

Information was provided that staff were not allowed to access open next generation AI platforms such as Chat GPT via the Sefton network; that the Council was very cognisant of the potential risks posed with AI; and that policies would be introduced to combat such risks and would be in line with industry standards and best practice.

RESOLVED:

That Cabinet and Council be advised that the Committee supports and endorses the proposed Digital Strategy.

**34. UPDATE ON PROGRESS OF LIVERPOOL CITY REGION
DIGITAL INCLUSION STRATEGY**

The Committee received a presentation from Stephan Van Arendsen, Executive Director – Corporate Services and Commercial that updated on the Liverpool City Region Digital Inclusion Strategy (the Strategy); and which sought views from the Committee regarding future updates. Mr. Van Arendsen provided information on:

- The digital inclusion initiative, facilitated by the Combined Authority and whose programme partners included Lloyds Bank, Assurant, Vodafone, FRC Group, had achieved its goal by supporting over 4700 individuals across LCR by December 2024
- Support to over 638 individuals in Sefton in relation to the provision of a free tablet, connectivity, in-person digital skills training; and that in Sefton, there were 26 delivery partner organisations
- The focus on supporting digitally excluded individuals across Cohort groups and demographics
- UKSPF Digital Connectivity Grants, which aimed to improve the public-facing ICT facilities of the voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise sector and that in total, £218,000 in grants were allocated to providers in Sefton
- LCR Digital Inclusion Network which now had over 220 organisations committed to tackling the Digital Divide and that 55 of these organisations had a presence in Sefton
- LCR Databank and that as part of the Good Things Foundation's National Databank, providing free data-sims to those in need, the Combined Authority had supported over 57 individuals through the Households into Work Sefton and Housing First Sefton Team
- Future plans, which included exploring possibilities with Lloyds Bank for 2025 to develop a proposal for wider support; and the intention to continue to work with the Combined Authority through Sefton Digital Inclusion Steering Group to develop future interventions and support for residents

Members of the Committee asked questions/commented on the following matters:

- Information was sought on the number of digital champions in Sefton; and specific training provision for vulnerable people such as those with learning disabilities. It was agreed that information would be circulated to Members on this matter
- Concern expressed about certain sectors of society such as older people who did not have the ICT skills to undertake activities such

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as online banking; and how the problem was compounded by the closure of many bank branches

- Reference was made to a drop-in services being run by Halifax bank, via Maghull Town Council advice centre
- How was success measured on the targeting of digitally excluded individuals; and were there any records or studies based on the positive impacts for our communities. It was noted that the performance indicators were collected quarterly on this and that these could be shared with Members
- Did the Strategy have an input into or links with the academic research associated with the Digital Minimum Living Standards
- As a balance, the importance of a non-digital strategy was referred to so that residents who had difficulties using online platforms could access services via call-centres, particularly if needing to deal with complex matters
- Concern expressed at the prevalence of online scams and it was stated that certain sectors of society were more vulnerable than others to fall prey to such scams. This resulted in a deterrent to using online services
- Problems associated with organisations not accepting digital downloaded documents, such as a Council Tax bill, as a valid form of identity

RESOLVED:

That Stephan Van Arendsen be thanked for his informative presentation.

35. ANNUAL ICT UPDATE REPORT

The Committee considered the report of the Executive Director of Corporate Services and Commercial that provided a summary of the performance of the Managed Services ICT Contract over the last 12 months, currently provided by Agilisys; and confirmed the arrangements for the Managed Services ICT Contract from the 1st of October 2025, following a procurement exercise completed in 2024.

The report indicated that the Agilisys Contract delivered the following core operational services to Sefton Council - helpdesk services, infrastructure and hardware, network services including cyber security, Council user services, telephony, application support including cloud services, data collection and ICT services report, installation services and active directory services; the following ad hoc services - project management services, major upgrade support, commissioning and decommissioning support, ad hoc reporting and data security services; and the following Schols ICT Services (Schools opt in for these bought back services) - support for management information systems (MIS), ICT Support (Connectivity) and fully managed services.

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The report also identified:

- that in respect of contract performance, during the contract period to date Agilisys had performed well and performance against key performance indicators, as reported monthly to Operational Board over the last 12 months, was attached to the report as Appendix A; and that customer satisfaction had remained high during the last 12 months, and any scores falling below expected standards were followed up on a case-by-case basis;
- that Agilisys provided a significant volume of ad hoc projects to Sefton, in line with the provisions of the Contract; and that the key projects for 2024 were the Data Centre move, the website improvement programme and Cyber Security; that these pieces of work supported the Councils Framework for Change Programme and the Sefton 2030 vision, as well as delivering key priorities within the Council's Digital Strategy; and that the projects were completed with minimal disruption to operational service delivery;
- the continuing risk associated with cyber security and that the Sefton ICT Client team had worked in partnership with Agilisys colleagues throughout the year to strengthen the Council's security profile and that in addition, the team had worked closely with internal training colleagues to strengthen our local training offer; that one of the key benefits of the current ICT contract with Agilisys was the access to a team of security experts; and that in addition, this year the team had secured Cyber Insurance cover for the Council;
- work completed by the ICT client team, , which included the delivery and of services and support for ICT across the Council, including specialist ICT Procurement and Contract Management for approximately 250 ICT Contracts; and that the team provided a dedicated System development support for both Children's and Adults' Social Care, as well as Education functions, supporting both the Children's Improvement Programme, and the SEND improvement programme.

Members of the Committee asked questions/commented on the following issues:

- the imposition of penalties for service failures in respect of key performance indicators
- the geographic location of Agilisys helpdesk staff
- the number of staff employed as part of the ICT client team
- the provision of the dedicated System development support for both Children's and Adults Social Care, as well as Education functions, supporting both the Children's Improvement Programme, and the SEND improvement programme
- recent cyber training activity and the swift resolution of ICT problems by the client team was commended

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- concern was expressed at the increasing sophistication of phishing attacks, which could become a safeguarding issue particularly for vulnerable residents
- the recent cyber-attack against St. Helens council, which caused significant disruption when key systems were lost, was referred to; and information was sought on whether lessons had been learned at Sefton following the attack. It was noted that Sefton did not use the same systems as St. Helens but nonetheless all emerging reports were reviewed; and that any lessons learned would be included within our cyber improvement plan

RESOLVED

That the performance of the ICT Service over the last 12 months be noted.