Cheltenham Borough Council

Information and Communications Technology Strategy, 2007-10

Foreword:

"Twenty First century government is enabled by technology – policy is inspired by it, business change delivered by it, customer and corporate services are dependent on it, and democratic engagement is exploring it. Moreover modern governments with serious transformational intent see technology as a strategic asset and not just a tactical tool. Technology alone does not transform government but government cannot transform to meet modern citizens' expectations without it"

Transformational government enabled by technology
Cabinet Office, November 2005

Information is the lifeblood of a council or any organisation. Without it we are unable to deliver services properly, to plan service development or to evaluate how we are doing. Wrong information, lost information or corrupted information can mean that services are inefficient or poorer than they could be.

Information can only be harnessed and used in the modern age with good information and communications technology (ICT) facilities. ICT meet business needs, but can also develop and change our existing services to make them more effective and efficient .

Cheltenham Borough Council will place ICT in a role which is a key part of our strategic planning and service delivery for modern, improved services and greater efficiency of operations. To do this ICT must be fit for purpose; is responsive, provide value for money, be reliable and open to developing in partnership with others for a challenging future. This strategy outlines how ICT will develop to meet this challenge and how the Council will support its future.

Cllr Andrew Wall, Cabinet Member, Internal Performance and Service Improvement

1. Introduction

Cheltenham Borough Council spend £2.3m each year on Information and Communications Technology (ICT) facilities and services. Yet for all this investment, we have no clear direction on how ICT is best harnessed centrally across the Council or within each Division.

It is time for a new direction for our use of ICT. A new direction that will enable us to focus and use our information assets and our technology ambitiously, and prudently, to deliver better and more efficient services that the Council and residents of Cheltenham want and need.

Our new strategy will cover the whole of CBC plus our arms length housing organisation, Cheltenham Borough Homes (CBH). It is recognised within the CBH ICT strategy that there is a commitment to the CBC technical infrastructure standards even when business needs are specific.

Our new strategy will help us meet the challenges we face over the next few years:

- Demand for better customer service offered through many different channels such as the internet and available when customers want to do business
- Recognition by the Council that it can use ICT better and in more strategic ways by linking technology and information management to other strategies and priorities
- Delivering more for less to make our services more efficient and effective
- Responding to the growing use of technology and growing data volumes within the Council
- Responding to external demands, government regulation and technology standards and protocols

2. Our vision

Our vision for ICT at Cheltenham Borough Council is:

> ***Information and communication technology which delivers tangible benefits to customers and positive transformations to the way the organisation works and delivers services***

This Council believes it should manage information for results. Information is a key asset and therefore we need to carefully consider how we use it as a lever to achieve better public services across the whole range of council business.

ICT facilities will enable the easy collection of data at the point nearest to where it is generated, easy secure storage and simple retrieval. It will also work towards eliminating duplication of information, double keying of information and information loss.

Facilities will be developed for the easy sharing of information and discussion based on principles of a digitised (non-paper) organisation and the belief that information

should be shared (and held on common ICT systems) unless there is a good reason not to.

To achieve our vision, all ICT services and infrastructure must have six key elements:

- Contributing towards the ***strategic direction*** of the council, its values and plans
- ***Enabling*** the full potential of information to be exploited
- ***Driven by corporate business requirements*** (external and internal customers)
- ***Best value***
- ***Innovative*** and developing technology opportunities
- ***Reliable and secure***

3. Benefits

The benefits of achieving our vision for ICT are:

- **Alignment of ICT and business resources** which are flexible and responsive to business needs and direct resources towards corporate priorities; putting first things first
- **Excellent customer service** which is available when needed at a cost which is transparent and represents good value
- **New business solutions** which help deliver and monitor excellent services to citizens
- **Cashable and non cashable savings** via greater efficiency and improved productivity
- **Reassurance of continuity** of ICT services
- **Better trained users and ICT staff** who are able to use ICT effectively and efficiently
- **New opportunities** from working collaboratively with others

These benefits will be quantified and stated in the detail plans arising from this strategy.

4. Developing the vision and understanding the implications

The six key elements of our vision provide a 'blueprint' for the new state of ICT: how it will look after changes have been made. This is detailed below together with potential implications for the current ICT provision.

1. Strategic direction
- An ICT strategy which is directly derived from the 3 year corporate business plan and existing key strategies

- An ICT strategy plan which is actively monitored by the Board of Directors and Councillors and its performance measured against corporate aspirations

- An ICT division which is actively involved in corporate forward planning, especially in the areas of customer access, finance, procurement, delivering efficiencies, HR strategy and accommodation

Implications

- To ensure alignment of the ICT strategic direction with CBC business plans there must be mechanisms within the business planning process to take account of ICT requirements and prioritise these at an appropriate stage
- The ICT division will be integral to all service planning where there are technology or information implications
- The Board of Directors will take overall ownership of major investment and development plans for ICT
- Ownership of ICT resources and equipment is held at a corporate level and used in the overall best interests of the council via the ICT strategy plans

2. **Enabling the full potential of using information**

- There are mechanisms and technology for the capture, storage and presentation of information at the point closest to where it is needed to serve the customer (internal and external)

- There are information standards built upon the key structured information repositories (people and places) and a register of assets which enable us to present information in a geographical or people context rather than service channel or service provision

- There is a technical framework and strategy to build a digitised organisation based on key information repositories (people and places)

- The knowledge base of the organisation is actively managed, by people and systems

- Ideas and potential are captured in the knowledge base (implicit knowledge becomes explicit)

- Data is never re-keyed or held in duplicate

Implications

- There are two common information repositories which serve all applications and information needs

- There are formal standards around information creation (tagging), storage, retrieval and retirement

- These formal standards are actively managed, primarily by those in business areas

- To achieve maximum leverage of data, common systems are the logical first choice where this is possible

- There is a framework for unstructured data storage which meets business needs and assists compliance with legislation

- Approaches must be developed for collaboration using digital mediums

- Business processes and systems must be developed to ensure information is only recorded digitally and once in a primary location

3. Driven by corporate business requirements

- ICT support and development is available when required by business areas and regularly reviewed with all service divisions in account management meetings

- Service standards and ICT performance against standards are reviewed, publicised and used to inform and develop ICT goals

- ICT champions meetings will provide further insight into how ICT is used and could be developed

- All business requirements for ICT change or development will be recorded and assigned a priority for implementation to produce a record of needs and a response to customers on likely delivery times

- Changes within the ICT environment will, where possible, be made with the consultation and agreement of end users

- Responses to requirements are planned in line with corporate needs and relevant national initiatives or directives and are subject to a prioritisation criteria which reflects the council's business plan priorities

- ICT training needs are reviewed and considered as part of account management and ICT training is tailored according to business needs

- The national e-service delivery standards (NeSDS) are used as a guide for planning developments in the services for which the standards exist

Implications

- Account management meetings, with an assigned individual ICT contact, will be the key communication channel between Divisional management teams and business units with ICT
- ICT Champions will be appointed to give detailed feedback on customer service issues and potential or existing ICT developments
- A Business needs and an Application log will be established and used to inform review and development of the strategy action plan

- Need to develop a set of performance information which is relevant to the user needs for ICT services and the value of those services

- Need to review availability and quality of ICT support services especially where there is a requirement for an out of office hours service

- Need to have some familiarity throughout the organisation of NeSDS to understand its applicability

4. Best value

- ICT functions are benchmarked on a regular basis to affirm value for money. Standards and performance of the ICT service is transparent and reviewed regularly

- ICT development, procurement and technical support is provided by ICT Division and driven corporately, harnessing economies of scale, unless there are clear and exceptional reasons why this should not be so. ICT should ensure maximum value is obtained from external suppliers where applicable

- Opportunities to work in partnership or shared services to deliver ICT services are evaluated and implemented if benefit can be illustrated. Work with other organisations is approached in an assertive and positive way to deliver common standards and maximum corporate benefit

- Business change, programmes and projects which involve ICT are managed using agreed corporate methodologies and techniques (Vanguard, MSP and PRINCE2) to an appropriate level of detail

- Users are trained to high standards and encouraged to have independence from traditional ICT support

- ICT hardware and software is provided by ICT to meet business need and procured at minimum realistic lifetime cost

- ICT systems architecture is steered by the principles of common corporate systems and standards where possible to allow efficient information flows and effective use of applications

- ICT re-charges to internal business units will be clear and offer users as much control over costs as possible by the use of costed menus where possible.

Implications

- Corporate ICT benchmarking and performance data needs to be reviewed and agreed, then used
- Arrangements for ICT planning, procurement and support where these are not currently within ICT will need to be reviewed and the transition to ICT planned along with any budget implications
- Partnership opportunities will be actively sought and where these exist they will be developed to the benefit of the Council
- A programme and project approach will need formalising in some areas as part of the ICT strategy action plan and there may be some training needs
- The ICT implications of business change need to be evaluated and a clear approach taken about how ICT is involved in change initiatives
- The training of 'expert' and standard users of ICT will need to be reviewed and appropriate training standards and guidance adopted.
- The training needs of the ICT Division will need to be reviewed along the lines of competency based job descriptions

- All ICT procurement (telephony, PC's and peripherals) must occur via ICT as a gateway using corporate procurement approaches. This activity will be reviewed to ensure best value
- Supplier management will be an activity shared between the business unit and ICT where applications and hardware cross Divisional boundaries

5. Innovative

- ICT will proactively offer opportunities for the evaluation and application of new technology in the business

- ICT will enable the use of potential organisation changing approaches such as remote working, working together with others as necessary to facilitate change

- ICT will co-ordinate technology change where similar requirements exist around the organisation resulting in a joined up, corporate approach to technology initiatives

- ICT systems will assist in the exchange and generation of ideas in a way which makes them useful to developing services

Implications

- Assessments of existing business applications may be required to reveal unused functionality
- Increased training required to assist users to take advantage of new options such as flexible working and greater exploitation of existing software
- New technology options will need to be devised and considered to meet areas of current or future needs
- Common solutions for shared issues will be developed across the organisation where possible

6. Reliable and secure

- ICT will protect corporate information from loss, corruption, unauthorised access and denial of service

- The council will have clear standards for technology derived from agreed corporate standards and best practice

- ICT equipment will be updated and renewed as required to maintain the service and provide resilience against failure

- Applications will be purchased within corporate standards and, unless there are exceptional reasons, as commercial off the shelf packages with support agreements

- Corporate standards for system security will be monitored and enforced by all staff and councillors

Implications

- Standards will need to be developed and enforced across three main areas; technical standards for the infrastructure, standards for those working in quasi technical roles and common standards for data storage
- Technical standards, other than statements of principle outlined in this strategy, will be detailed within the Information Security Policy and enforced within all areas of ICT technical activity
- More emphasis will need to be placed on the scaleability and robustness of information systems
- Opportunities will be considered for technology standards which are common such as Gov connects
- Ongoing ICT governance in terms of standards, changes and developments, including strategy reviews and enforcement will require consistency across the council

5. How do we get where we need to be?

The gap between the ICT vision and the current state will be bridged by a number of actions which are listed in the ICT Strategy Action plan and put into action by the Assistant Director, ICT. The action plan will be approved by the Board of Directors, monitored within the Council performance management systems and subject to quarterly progress reviews and comprehensive annual review.

A significant context for the ICT strategy is the commitment by this Council to adopt systems thinking in all it's work and especially for customer facing work. This will be a guiding principle and dictate the timing of some elements of the action plan. ICT resources will be 'pulled' into areas of work to support a lean systems approach rather than introducing systems in advance of introducing systems thinking.

6. Conclusions

Cheltenham Borough Council firmly believes that the innovative and good deployment of information, technology and voice communications solutions can help it deliver better services and better value for money. This strategy makes clear an intention to do exactly that over the next three years.