

28th October 2022

WLGA Digital Leadership Board Update

Purpose

- 1 To update members on the work of the Chief Digital Officer and the establishment of the WLGA Digital Leadership Board.

Background

- 2 The Local Government Chief Digital Officer (CDO) was recruited in October 2020 and has been building the team over the past 22 months, to increase the compliment to 10 digital practitioners. Originally the role and associated office was created as a three-year programme which would be used to assess the impact and progress that could be made by having a dedicated and focussed Local Government strategic digital leader in place.
- 3 At the end of the 2021-22 year, the Welsh Government decided that the role and the office had succeeded in establishing itself and had significant impact on the sector. The Minister for Finance and Local Government confirmed that the CDO and team would become permanent from 1st April 2022, and would sit within the WLGA, with funding transferring from an annual grant into top-slice funding to the WLGA.

WLGA Digital Leadership Board

- 4 The Digital Leadership Board met for the first time on 20th September 2022. The Board is chaired by Cllr Jane Mudd, and includes Cllrs Neil Prior (Pembrokeshire), Cllr Chris Weaver (Cardiff), Cllr Gill German (Denbighshire) and Cllr Clive Griffiths (Ceredigion) and also includes SOLACE Digital Lead Paul Matthews (Monmouthshire) and chair of the Heads of IT Network Huw Ynyr (Gwynedd).
- 5 The Board is responsible for reviewing and advising the digital strategy and delivery plan for the Welsh Local Government Digital team; supporting and promoting the work of the Welsh Local Government Digital team; supporting and challenging local authorities to ensure that digital remains at the forefront of strategy and delivery and promoting digital leadership and transformation and encouraging consistency of digital standards across local government.
- 6 The Board considered the chief digital officer's annual report, the business plan for 2022-23 and received an update on the digital transformation fund.

Chief Digital Officer

7. Sam Hall, the current Local Government Chief Digital Officer, will be leaving the WLGA at the end of October having been appointed to a new role in Digital Health and Care Wales.
8. The WLGA Digital Leadership Board and WLGA senior leadership have considered interim and permanent options for the recruitment of a new Chief Digital Officer. Welsh Ministers are particularly keen to ensure continuity and leadership of the local government digital agenda.
9. As reported to the Executive Board in September, the WLGA leadership has requested a review of the WLGA senior management structure, alongside a wider post-election review of the WLGA's corporate strategy. This review is expected to be undertaken before Christmas and any recommendations would need to be subsequently considered by the chief executive and leadership. This review may therefore have implications for the role of Chief Digital Officer as well as other senior WLGA management roles. The permanent recruitment of a new Chief Digital Officer before or during this review would therefore be premature and could impact on any recommendations of the senior management review being implemented.
10. The WLGA has recently appointed a Head of Delivery to replace the previous incumbent and is planning to appoint an interim Head internally in advance of the new Head taking post in December. These arrangements will ensure continuity of delivery of the agreed projects and leadership of the team. An interim Chief Digital Officer role may also be considered depending on the progress of the senior management review.

Annual Report 2021-22

11. There were a clear set of deliverables agreed with Welsh Government as part of the business plan for the digital grant of £790k for 2021-22. These were all met, with the exception of recruitment.

- Approval and publication of the Local Government Digital Strategy for Wales
- Deliver 5 Discovery Projects into issues raised by Local Authorities
- Develop a Capability Model for digital and support Local Authorities to implement
- Deliver a digital conference for Wales
- Create, submit and gain approval of the delivery plan for 2022-23
- Recruit an additional 4 roles to the team
- Deliver 4 project research phases and associated reports
- Deliver digital training to 250 Local Government officers

12. Some notable highlights from this period include:

- The [**Local Government Digital Strategy 2021-23**](#), developed through engagement with local government digital leaders, was approved by WLGA Executive Board in September 2021.
- Discoveries, which are initial short projects looking at identified problems which seek to understand the needs that are not being met by current service delivery.

The topics taken forward were eLearning, Education Management Systems, Webcasting for Council Meetings, Welsh Libraries Digital Services and All Wales Image Library.

- The Capability Model work is now being taken forward into this year in our work on Learning Framework which looks at developing pathways for digital practitioners in Local Government to help them develop their skills and careers in digital. This work has become critical to support the current recruitment and retention challenges being felt across most of the Local Authorities digital and technology teams.

13. The Digital Conference took place online, on 20 January 22, and was attended by over 100 people. Sessions included digital in a post-COVID world, bilingual service development, scaling digital expertise across public services and building a positive culture.

14. The Delivery Plan for 2022-23 was submitted to Welsh Government and agreed. Funding to cover delivery of the plan was also agreed, including an uplift to cover the staff pay review and additional funding for more skills and training this year.

15. Whilst the team was able to recruit 2 extra members of staff, not all roles were initially filled due to high market demand for digital practitioners. Contingent labour was used for short periods to cover key roles when required and these roles have now been filled.

16. Four project phased work were also delivered-

- **Life Events** which looked at how citizens used services when faced with general events throughout their lives. One of the main strategic themes is 'Human Centred Design'. This ensures that local authorities can view services as an opportunity to help a person rather than a set of individual transactions that need to be completed. To do this, there is a need to first understand how citizens interact and engage with their local authority over the course of their lifetime, and how changes in their circumstances impact this engagement.
- **Service Blueprints** which looked at the similarities between services across Welsh Local Authorities and how could a design blueprint be created which would be a 'best in breed' version that all authorities could use. It also addressed the point raised in previous rounds of Transformation Fund bids where often fund requests were duplicated across several authorities, when in reality they are looking to solve the same problem.
- **Image Library Alpha** which followed the Discovery work completed earlier in the year. It focussed on the creation of a shared library of images that can be reused and shared, and which satisfy intellectual property rules. This Alpha was expanded to include requirements from Welsh Government who asked to join the project and look to find a holistic approach that could be used much more widely in Wales. This project could move to the next phase, Beta, however, our resources are limited at this time.
- **Commercialisation and discretionary services.** Local Authorities are seeking to deliver a greater financial return to contribute to the safeguarding and development of frontline services that the authorities currently provide. The authorities have

mentioned that this needs to be done because of the scale of current and future financial challenges. They highlight that the demand and expectations of local authority services continues to rise but with less funding to deliver them. The authorities are hoping to narrow this disparity through building revenue and saving costs. The Digital Team looked at the development of strategies across the authorities and completed a piece of desk research to understand opportunities. Engagement with finance experts and senior leaders in authorities helped to design a survey to gain more information around the varying positions councils find themselves in.

17. Given the budgetary and capacity constraints, the results of the work delivered last year were reviewed to shape direction for 2022-23. As such the Life Events and Service Blueprints work has been combined and is now being taken forward this year. The Image Library and Commercialisation work is in the team's backlog and is reviewed periodically should resource be available to take it forward in the future.
18. The target of training 250 officers was met. It is worth noting that some officers undertook multiple training streams resulting in over 400 completed learning opportunities taken up by a wide range of officers across the whole of the country. Some examples of the training undertaken: User-experience Design, Content Design, Designing Good Services, User Focussed User Research and Writing for the Web.
19. The team is committed to 'working in the open' and blogs about its projects and approach. More details on 2021-22 and now 2022-23 work can be found on the [Welsh Local Government Digital](#) website.

Delivery Plan 2022-23

20. The Delivery Plan for 2022-23 has been agreed with Welsh Government and was discussed by the Board. The Plan includes the following projects.
 - 17.1 **Life Events Service Design** - Exploring how can we make it easier for the people of Wales to engage with council services in a way that helps them efficiently fix their problems, address their issues, or achieve a specific need
 - 17.2 **Merthyr Food Poverty Data Project** - To understand if citizen data held across multiple council systems could in some way be combined to help officers identify, at the earliest opportunity, citizens at risk of falling into poverty.
 - 17.3 **Start a career in Local Government Digital** - Developing an 18 month-programme to bring people to train and work within local government, to upskill them in digital and providing local councils with trained staff to help them deliver project work.
 - 17.4 **Learning Frameworks** - Creating a framework that officers can use to upskill themselves in digital disciplines, growing capability within Authorities.
 - 17.5 **Digital Maturity Assessments** - A Digital Maturity Assessment is a tool to support and measure a councils' digital maturity, for it to focus on and measure key tactics to meet its ambitions. The team is working with several authorities on undertaking digital maturity assessments.

17.6 **Digital Town and Community Councils** – working with a third party to write a report and recommendations for town and community councils.

17.7 **Education Management Information** – currently working on a discovery to understand what authorities, schools, parents, teachers, etc need from education management information – looking at what needs to be bought/built to help manage education in the future. It is anticipated that this project will need longer-term commitment and resource, depending on the outcome of the discovery phase.

17.8 **Training** – more training for officers and members will be made available, will be tailoring some of the training to the learning frameworks.

Digital Transformation Fund 2022-23

21. The WLGA digital team is managing the £1million Welsh Government fund as a pilot for 2022-23. The fund was created in 2018 to maximise and identify opportunities to progress the digital transformation of local government in Wales and was previously managed by the Welsh Government Local Government Transformation team.
22. An application process was undertaken during the summer and the following collaborative bids have progressed:

Topic	Authority(ies)	Brief Information
Digital Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bridgend• Carmarthenshire• Vale of Glamorgan• Wrexham	Transformation of local authority services in Wales is being inhibited by a scarcity of digital skills and resources. Barriers to collaboration and resource sharing is leading to a poorer experience for residents and potentially spiralling resource costs as organisations compete for resources across the whole economy. Welsh local authorities face a significant challenge in recruiting and retaining staff with the digital skills sets required to make key changes to transform the citizen experience and the delivery and support of council services. The partners would like to explore options for a collaborative approach, exploring all available options to improve the digital skill sets across the Welsh Local Government landscape and align our resources in a sustainable and shared manner to resolve the resource problem.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Caerphilly • Blaenau Gwent • Carmarthenshire • Merthyr Tydfil 	<p>During 2020/2021, the WLGA digital team worked with a consortium of 4 local authorities who collectively researched and completed an Alpha to find a future-proofed digital learning solution to meet the workforce development requirements of local authorities and their communities within Wales. As a group they challenged current choices and in particular the national concern regarding non-engaging eLearning sites that felt to the user more of a management led tick box. One of the findings from the Alpha which is something to consider moving into a Beta phase of the project (before the product is fully live and operational) is how we will embed a culture of continuous reflection and iteration. The Beta phase of this project should work out the procurement and governance structure for a sustainable shared solution for Welsh councils. There will be implementation costs that can be reduced using the benefits of economy of scale.</p>
Digital Inclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Torfaen • Monmouthshire • Blaenau Gwent • Caerphilly • Newport • The Shared Resource Service (SRS) 	<p>The problem is digital exclusion: partners do not have an evidence-based nor deep understanding of who is digitally excluded and why (e.g. capacity (economic, infrastructure, opportunities etc.) and/or capability (education; use of devices etc)); who is at risk of becoming digitally excluded; and therefore how we can work locally and on a Gwent-wide basis with public sector partners (including potentially Gwent Police, Aneurin Bevan and at a regional PSB level) to target interventions to reduce digital exclusion, measure outcomes and ensure the needs of digitally excluded customers are factored into service design activity. We are limited to explore digital exclusion from the confines of data from our current customers, and national statistics which provides a high-level view of digital exclusion, but limited understanding as to who this affects and how best to provide targeted and impactful support.</p>
Independent Living	Pembrokeshire	<p>How do you engage and promote the use of potential preventative technology into people's lives before they are in need? Early introduction and intervention of technology can help its use become embedded and familiar into daily routines at a stage in a person's life where they still have capacity to learn new tasks and skills. Those skills can then be built on when the needs arise.</p>

Modernising Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Blaenau Gwent • Monmouthshire • Torfaen • Newport 	During user research, user stories, usability tests and analytics, we have considerable evidence that citizens and staff have problems finding and understanding our content. This includes content on web pages, mobile apps, search engines, applications (i.e., Planning and Building Control or Blue Badge), guidance, letters, flyers, social media, invoices, and bills – all internal and external content.
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23. The WLGA digital team will support the projects to share learning and also seek opportunities to scale with other councils or public sector bodies, embedding shared data standards and making technology as scalable as possible. The WLGA digital team is working closely with Centre for Digital Public Services and the Office of the Welsh Government CDO to support the work across Welsh councils.

Recommendations

24. Members are recommended to note the paper.

Report Cleared by:

Cllr Jane Mudd & Cllr Neil Prior, WLGA Spokespersons for Digital and Innovation

Authors: Daniel Hurford, Head of Policy
Sam Hall, Local Government Chief Digital Officer

E-mails: daniel.hurford@wlga.gov.uk
sam.hall@wlga.gov.uk