Digital progress in local government

ACCOUNTS COMMISSION

Key messages and recommendations
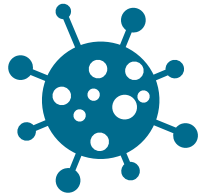
1. Progress and impact of Covid-19

Councils are at different stages of digital transformation. Progress is strongest where councils have focused on how digital technology can deliver better outcomes for people. The pace of change has increased as digital technologies have played a vital role in the public sector's response to the Covid-19 pandemic. It has also heightened the awareness of digital exclusion.

Recommendations:
To maintain momentum, councils should assess their progress, learn lessons, and identify and address barriers and inequalities.

2. Becoming a digital council

Clear vision and leadership, with workforce and community engagement, are essential for realising the benefits of digital transformation. Delivering change requires a culture of collaboration and innovation, as well as aligned strategies and plans, effective governance, and engaged and informed elected members.

Recommendations:
Councils should have a clear digital vision and strategy that sets out how digital transformation will deliver better outcomes for people. The strategy should be supported by plans detailing actions, timescales and the required investment in technology, people and skills.

Councils should have a structured approach to collaboration and innovation, with staff given space and time to learn, test new ideas and put them into practice. Councils should actively collaborate through the Digital Office and other regional partnerships.

Key messages and recommendations

3. Citizens at the heart

There has been a lack of citizen involvement in digital service design and not enough focus on outcomes in monitoring progress of digital programmes.

Recommendations:

To better understand the needs of citizens, councils should have a citizen and community engagement plan and ensure they have sufficient staff with the skills to carry out service design.

Councils need to improve how they monitor outcomes. This could include adopting a benefits realisation approach.

4. Workforce and skills

Insufficient staff capacity and digital skills are the most significant barriers to progress. There are digital skills initiatives in place, but there needs to be better alignment with councils' wider workforce plans.

Recommendations:

Councils should conduct a staff skills survey to better understand what digital and data skills they need. Councils should have detailed workforce and skills development plans, including for leadership teams and elected members, that align with digital transformation plans.

Key messages and recommendations

5. Data and technology

Councils are starting to develop strategies to make better use of data. Data standards, governance and ethics are important areas in which councils need to make progress. Legacy systems, however, remain a barrier.

Recommendations:

Councils should understand their technology infrastructure and have a clear plan to address legacy systems to create better coordinated solutions. This could include common platforms and shared procurement.

Councils should work with the Digital Office and Scottish Government in developing common data standards and a data ethics approach.

6. National leadership and collaboration

There needs to be greater leadership and clarity of roles at a national level, with consistent vision and direction across the sector. The Digital Office has enabled councils to collaborate, share knowledge and innovate. Opportunities exist for it to do more but this requires changes to how it works, how councils support it and how it is funded.

Recommendations:

The refresh of the digital strategy for Scotland provides an opportunity for all organisations which support the delivery of digital transformation in local government to set the vision and agree shared priorities. These organisations, including the Digital Office, the Improvement Service and councils, should:

- agree on and clearly articulate their roles and responsibilities
- identify where a shared approach would add value to developing and delivering common systems and platforms, and specialist skills
- review the funding and delivery model for the Digital Office, to ensure it has the capacity and support to deliver on the agreed priorities
- streamline a work programme for the Digital Office, with each part of the programme having senior-level sponsorship.

Context

Digital technologies are an essential part of our lives. Before the Covid-19 pandemic, the way we lived and worked, and how organisations operated, delivered public services and interacted with citizens was rapidly changing. Since March 2020, the pace of that change has accelerated. Organisations have had to innovate and collaborate on a scale never seen before. Digital technology has become a lifeline, allowing the continued delivery of public services, often to the most vulnerable in society. Its use has also exposed the risk of digital exclusion – not having the skills or resources to access vital public services, maintain learning, and stay connected with others.

Councils are at different stages in their digital progress

Transforming public services and building a digital council is difficult and takes time. Becoming a digital council involves moving away from technology-led strategies and plans to become more outward looking, focusing on how digital technology can deliver better outcomes for citizens, communities and council staff. It involves understanding the needs of staff and service users, involving them in the process and creating a culture that embraces change and collaboration.

Each council has started from a different position depending on its available resources (money and people), the state of its existing systems and its culture. These factors will determine the level of future investment required and how quickly a council can transform. The level of investment will vary greatly across councils as a result. To become a digital council, investment will be required in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) infrastructure (hardware, software and cloud services), council staff and digital leadership.

Those further ahead are beginning to exploit data and information to better understand their communities and staff, and deliver better services. This transformation is still at an early stage, but progress is being made.

Common priorities across councils include:

- increasing online service provision, with round-the-clock self-service access

- increasing flexible and mobile working, allowing staff to access real-time data for services such as social care, housing repairs and waste management

- using technology to support democratic functions such as hosting committee meetings and surgeries online.

The Covid-19 pandemic has acted as a catalyst for all of this and has accelerated the deployment of digital technology and collaboration across the sector. The pandemic has also highlighted the importance of digital access and connectivity, and we expect that these will be a key focus of councils' future digital plans and strategies.

Councils operate in a complex environment

Councils operate in a complex and challenging environment. Our local government overview reports have highlighted the importance of collaborative working in making the best use of resources. Councils work with, and are influenced by, a range of public, third sector and private sector organisations and partnerships.

In 2015, the Scottish Local Government Digital Partnership (Digital Partnership) was established by SOLACE and the Local Government Transformation Board to drive the ambition for all councils to be digital businesses by 2020. It is a collaboration between all local government organisations involved in digital transformation, including all 32 councils in Scotland.

In October 2016 the Digital Partnership established the Digital Office for Scottish Local Government (Digital Office). It supports councils to become digital businesses through delivery of a work programme focused on Digital Leadership, Digital Foundations and Digital Services. It has a small core team that provides support and digital expertise.

The Digital Partnership and Digital Office are supported by a Digital Partnership Board which oversees the overall strategy and work programme. The Digital Partnership Board's membership includes key organisations involved in digital transformation in local government.

The Scottish Government, together with COSLA, the Digital Office and the Improvement Service, is currently working on a refreshed digital strategy for Scotland. This will provide an overarching framework, priorities and principles that will shape subsequent sector-specific plans. The strategy is expected to be published in Spring 2021.

Other organisations involved in digital transformation in local government and members of the Digital Partnership Board include:

- Scottish Government

- COSLA

- Improvement Service – The national improvement organisation for local government in Scotland. It delivers a range of products and services to help councils with digital transformation.

- Scotland Excel – The centre of procurement expertise for local government. It is working with the Digital Office to develop a common approach to procurement and common digital solutions.

- Socitm Scotland – The leading network for ICT and digital professionals from across Scotland's public sector.

- SEEMiS – Scottish local government's Education Management Information System provider. It is used by all of Scotland's council-run schools for education administration and processes and manages all education-related data.

About this report

This report:

- sets out the key characteristics of a digital council

- looks at how well councils are putting in place the building blocks required for digital transformation

- examines what opportunities exist and what barriers to progress there are

- provides examples that demonstrate how some councils are transforming

- examines how councils have used digital technology to respond to the Covid-19 pandemic and what can be learned from this.

The findings in this report are based on case study work carried out at six councils. This was complemented by wider-reaching work looking at the role that key national stakeholders play in supporting councils to transform.

Links

📁 Examples

ⓘ Info box

⚠ Barrier

🖳 Web link

⊕ PDF download

Digital ehub

To help councils improve, we have developed a set of resources for councils and elected members on our digital ehub.

These resources include:

Good practice guide that highlights things leadership teams, senior officers and elected members should consider putting in place to help them progress.

Checklist with questions for elected members, to help them scrutinise and challenge digital progress in their council.

Examples and case studies of digital transformation.

Previous reports

This report follows on from our previous reports:

Principles for a digital future
May 2017

Enabling digital government
June 2019

These highlighted the importance of strategic leadership, culture, skills, collaboration, innovation and involving users in the design of services in delivering digital transformation.

This report draws on these themes and examines what progress councils are making towards becoming digital councils. It aims to help councils improve by highlighting what becoming a digital council involves. It is aimed principally at senior management within councils and elected members.

Key characteristics of a digital council

A digital council is focused on delivering better outcomes for its citizens through the best use of people and digital technology. Having the right skills and culture in place is critical and underpins each of these characteristics:

Each characteristic can be navigated to by the tabs at the top of the pages.

Digital leadership

Communicates a clear digital vision and ambition and creates an innovative and collaborative culture that drives change. Understands the potential of people and digital technologies to transform services for citizens.
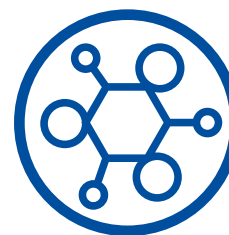
User focused

Understands the needs of citizens, communities and staff affected by services and policies, and involves them in service design. Focuses on improving outcomes for citizens and other users.

Digital workforce

Has the skills, knowledge and confidence to develop new ways of working, including using new technology.

Collaborative

Develops new ways of working together, sharing good practice and ideas across services and between councils and sectors, and involves citizens and communities.

Technology & data enabled

Makes best use of digital technology to build common solutions, that can be reused and shared to create better value for money. Uses and shares data securely to inform decision-making, enable joint services and achieve better outcomes for citizens.

Innovative

Has a culture of openness and improvement, looks outwards and explores how services can be delivered differently. Has the capacity, capability and processes in place to implement change.

Digital leadership

Communicates a clear digital vision and ambition and creates an innovative and collaborative culture that drives change. Understands the potential of people and digital technologies to transform services for citizens.

Councils that are making progress have a digital vision and strategy focused on improving outcomes for citizens

- Councils that are making progress have visions for digital transformation that go beyond technology to focus on people and outcomes. Their strategies are more outward looking and are linked to wider corporate priorities.

- Plans detailing how and when visions will be achieved are less well developed.

- Audit Scotland's *Planning for Outcomes* paper outlines how an outcomes-based approach could work in practise across the public sector in Scotland.

Planning for Outcomes
June 2019

Glasgow City Council's digital strategy has two major themes: digital economy and digital public services. The strategy is linked to its wider ambitions for the local area and contains an extensive action plan, with detailed goals and outcomes to support the council in achieving its vision of Glasgow becoming:

'A world-class city with a thriving digital economy and community, where everyone can flourish and benefit from the best digital connectivity and skills, where technology is used to improve everyone's quality of life, drive businesses' innovation and service design and improve our city, its neighbourhoods and its success.' (Digital Glasgow Strategy)

North Lanarkshire council manager: 'We can't look at being a digital council without thinking about wider communities.'

Digital strategies are most effective when leaders champion change and staff are engaged

- Councils that have made progress with digital plans have a chief executive and elected members who have made digital transformation a priority and champion its benefits.

- Councils with a good level of buy-in from staff have leadership teams that have created a culture of sustained staff engagement and support. The leadership teams articulate what the vision means and how it will be achieved.

- Leadership teams can play a key role in creating a collaborative culture and mindset across an organisation.

- There are examples of good staff engagement, but many councils are at an early stage of implementing their strategies and this engagement needs to be sustained.

North Lanarkshire Council found that having a corporate communications strategy was critical to its success in sharing digital goals. The approach focused on engaging with key groups including staff, residents, businesses and elected members through multiple channels. The chief executive and senior leadership team have taken responsibility for engaging the workforce in delivering digital change across the council. They have communicated with staff directly about digital transformation through digital roadshows, live and online Q&A sessions and a digital transformation newsletter.

Barriers

Services (and sectors) often work in silos and there is little collaboration between them. This can be a barrier to creating an organisation-wide digital culture.

Leadership teams must have the right level of digital awareness, expertise and skills

- Leadership teams with an understanding of the opportunities and risks that digital technology presents can better prioritise, develop plans and scrutinise progress.

- Councils should ensure that digital leadership skills are in place. Initiatives such as the Scottish Government's Digital Champions programme are helping councils develop these skills.

The Scottish Government launched its Digital Champions programme in October 2013, primarily to develop the digital skills and awareness of public sector leaders. It provides the opportunity to learn about innovation, technology and how to deliver digital programmes. However, it also provides opportunities to collaborate by creating a network of leaders with a common interest in delivering better public services.

Barriers

A lack of the skills and resources required to drive the development and implementation of plans and set priorities is a key barrier. People with the necessary digital expertise need to be involved in strategic decisions.

Involvement of elected members is not well developed

- Few councils have a dedicated council committee with a remit for digital transformation or nominated elected members involved in championing digital transformation.

- A lack of digital skills and knowledge among elected members prevents more thorough scrutiny of digital programmes.

- There is some evidence of councils providing digital skills training and support for elected members but appetite and participation is varied.

Glasgow City Council has a dedicated elected member Digital Champion and the digital programme board includes both council officers who have an in-depth knowledge of digital transformation and methods and elected members.

Two-thirds of elected members who responded to a Digital Office survey expressed a desire to better understand how to design services to meet citizens' needs and what types of digital skills are needed now and in the future. The Digital Office has worked with the Improvement Service to develop training for elected members on digital leadership and skills. A workshop in January 2020 was attended by 22 elected members from 14 councils.

Barriers

Low levels of digital literacy, risk aversion and concerns about digital exclusion among elected members can be barriers to progress.

Councils have adjusted governance arrangements to ensure the right level of scrutiny for digital programmes

- Councils making progress have adapted arrangements to ensure timely and effective scrutiny.

- Some councils have found it difficult to put the right governance structures in place to achieve a good balance between operational decision-making and strategic oversight.

- There is no one-size-fits-all structure or approach, but effective arrangements tend to include more centralised assurance, including:

  - a committee with a remit to scrutinise digital programmes

  - a digital delivery/programme board with overall strategic control

  - an operational board or corporate groups to monitor delivery of specific digital programmes, which may be at service level or have cross-council membership.

North Lanarkshire Council has a dedicated committee with a remit for digital transformation. It has 25 elected members on it, whose role it is to scrutinise the delivery of the digital programme, Digital NL. The council also has a digital delivery board that provides overall strategic control for the programme and a corporate working group that ensures any new products or technologies align with Digital NL aims and reuse existing solutions or integrate with the council's digital platform.

Investment to date has been largely focused on technology and infrastructure

- While most councils have some form of investment programme for digital transformation, the scale of financial investment varies. It is important that medium-term investment plans align with wider transformation aims.

- Investment to date has been focused on buying and maintaining infrastructure and systems. Councils are beginning to invest in new and different infrastructure to enable collaboration and transformation but also need to invest in people and skills to get the best use out of the technology.

- Councils need to continue to invest in addressing the risks of legacy systems.

- Councils are moving to **cloud**-based solutions recognising the potential to reduce the maintenance burden and to provide a flexible resource that responds to demand. While this reduces capital spending, it shifts spending to revenue budgets which are often already stretched.

Cloud: delivering computing services such as software, data storage and servers over the internet.

Technical architecture: the strategic choices of hardware, software, and networks that support the operation of an organisation.

Fife Council has prioritised investment in ICT infrastructure and enabling technologies that will support service transformations. This is allowing the council to create better value for money through reuse of common systems and address the limitations of legacy systems. The council has clear investment plans for these projects and is now looking at how to invest in people and skills.

Barriers

Councils still have a large number of legacy systems and will need to continue to invest in their **technical architecture** as well as people and skills. Legacy systems create risks for councils in the need for staff resources to maintain them. They can also present security risks, can lack interoperability with the latest systems and software, and can experience hardware failures.

Councils have expressed frustration with traditional procurement processes with suppliers, suggesting that they hamper innovation and would benefit from a more collaborative approach.
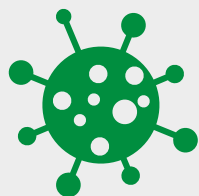
Covid-19 has helped develop digital leadership and moved digital transformation up councils' agendas

Accelerated digital plans
The Covid-19 pandemic has accelerated digital plans by up to two to three years, with the rapid deployment of digital technology and new digital services.

Recognition of the potential of digital technologies
Leadership teams now show greater recognition of the potential of digital technologies to enable councils to deliver services differently and respond to the needs of citizens and communities.

Review digital plans and strategies
Councils are starting to review their digital plans and strategies. During the pandemic recovery phase, it will be important for councils to reassess plans and gain an understanding of what factors have enabled the rapid pace of change. For example, Clackmannanshire Council is appointing an additional strategic director with responsibility for transformation and recovery.

Adapting to virtual tools
Elected members have adapted well to using video-conferencing tools to hold virtual surgeries and attend virtual council meetings.

User focused

Understands the needs of citizens, communities and staff affected by services and policies, and involves them in service design. Focuses on improving outcomes for citizens and other users.

Involving users in service design is still limited in practice

- Digital strategies are starting to focus on how digital technology can help deliver better outcomes for citizens and communities.

- **User research** and **service design** methods are not yet well established in councils and the Scottish Approach to Service Design is not widely understood.

- There are good examples of front-line workers being involved in service design, but the involvement of citizens and communities is limited in practice.

- All users are not the same, different methods should be used and considerations made when involving citizens from when involving staff.

Service design: service design approaches involve developers working with the users of services or systems to define the problems before thinking about and designing solutions.

User research: building an understanding of the needs and desires of users of a service or system through observation techniques, analysis and feedback.

Perth and Kinross Council formed a multi-disciplinary team in the transformation of its homecare and recovery service and adoption of digital technology to assist mobile working. An experienced member of the service was seconded to lead the project team, providing more effective sharing of expert knowledge. Front-line staff contributed at key stages to ensure new ways of working matched staff and citizens' needs.

The Centre for Civic Innovation in Glasgow carries out service design work as part of its innovation approach. Glasgow City Council is working with the centre to increase the skills of its digital team in service design so that this can be used more widely in transformation projects.

Barriers
Councils have neither the tools nor sufficient staff with the skills required to carry out user research and involve users in service design.

Councils need to improve how they monitor outcomes from digital change

- Digital progress and success are still mainly measured in terms of efficiencies and cost savings rather than what benefits they can bring to citizens and staff.

- Councils need to develop a benefits-realisation approach that includes financial and non-financial benefits for staff, citizens and communities.

Perth and Kinross Council has developed a benefits-realisation framework to identify and capture financial and non-financial benefits from digital transformation projects. The framework identifies examples of non-financial benefits, such as improved staff satisfaction or work/life balance, improved customer satisfaction, and improved management information and data quality to better inform decisions. The framework recognises that these things are difficult to measure but highlights the importance of considering their impacts.

Councils are adopting a 'digital first' approach but must ensure that no one is left behind

- Councils are moving services online to deliver a more responsive customer experience that offers round-the-clock access, self-service and keeps citizens up to date.

- To address digital exclusion, councils are retaining traditional contact channels, providing assisted digital services and moving services to community hubs to provide access.

- Councils need to understand the needs of those experiencing digital exclusion and put a strategy in place to ensure equity in customer experiences and access to services for all citizens and communities.

Clackmannanshire Council has developed a new citizen portal to improve customer experience and transform the way customers report, book and apply and pay for services online. This is a key project within the council's Digital Strategy and plans.

The Improvement Service has worked with councils to put in place MyAccount. MyAccount provides citizens with a single sign-in account to access council services. It can be integrated with multiple council systems, provides security and authentication, and is currently used by 24 councils, with more coming on board.

Barriers

Digital exclusion is a significant issue. There are still citizens and communities that do not have access to an affordable or reliable internet connection, an appropriate device, or the skills to effectively engage with digital public services. Audit Scotland has reported on connectivity in the *Superfast broadband for Scotland* report.

Redesigning services and moving them online requires staff resources, which are in short supply in councils.
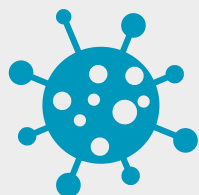
Covid-19 has increased the focus on service users and the awareness of the risks of digital exclusion

New solutions
Councils have moved more services online and quickly developed new solutions to meet new needs. This includes equipping staff for homeworking, providing everyday essentials including food and medical supplies for those required to 'shield', and supporting school pupils with home learning.

More outcome focused
Responding to Covid-19 has also provided a clearer focus on achieving outcomes.

Digital exclusion
The shift of services online has exacerbated digital exclusion for those who use traditional channels or rely on community facilities such as libraries to access digital public services.

Devices and data roll out
Councils launched initiatives to roll out devices and data packages to both school children and vulnerable households. This has included making use of the Scottish Government's Connecting Scotland initiative. The programme has provided devices, data and skills to 9,000 people with a high clinical risk. It has been extended and aims to support 50,000 digitally excluded people by the end of 2021.

e-Sgoil is a service delivered by the education department of Comhairle nan Eilean Siar. e-Sgoil delivers real-time interactive lessons via the internet to pupils across Scotland in a range of subject areas. e-Sgoil was set up in 2017-18 with the initial aim of providing pupils in remote island communities with equal access to learning and subject choices. It is now being looked at as a national solution to ensure continued access to learning during the Covid-19 pandemic. Our audit on education outcomes will be published in spring 2021 and will look at the role of digital technology in the response of the education sector to the Covid-19 pandemic.

In November 2020, CivTech launched a sprint challenge with Connecting Scotland focused on getting citizens more meaningfully involved in designing the public services that many of them use. Initially it will focus on the Connecting Scotland user base but has potential to be used more widely across the public sector.

Digital workforce

Has the skills, knowledge and confidence to develop new ways of working, including using new technology.

Insufficient staff capacity and digital skills are the most significant barriers to progress

- Councils do not have enough staff with the required digital skills to implement their digital plans successfully.

- ICT teams have faced resource pressures in recent years, with some downsizing their ICT teams. At the same time the skills set needed to support digital transformation is changing.

- Councils need to carry out digital skills surveys to understand what skills staff have and where the gaps are. There are gaps at different levels within councils:

  – digital leadership: awareness and understanding of digital technology and its possibilities, and collaboration and change management skills

  – digital and ICT teams: data skills and business analysis, service design and user research, cyber security, and change and project management

  – wider workforce: essential digital skills and awareness in online and remote working.

- Councils should develop a competency framework that sets out the digital skills needed across the workforce.

The Digital Office is working in partnership with the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (SCVO) to put in place a Digital Champions programme for council workforces. This will start with a baseline skills survey using SCVO's Essential Digital Skills Framework.

Perth and Kinross Council has a digital skills team in place to support employees grow confidence in using new technologies. The team uses a range of media to engage staff and also provides skills support in major digital change programmes. The council has a Digital Charter that describes an informal set of digital skills against which staff can measure themselves and links to self-help resources for skills development.

Barriers

Digital skills shortages are common across the Scottish economy and a public sector wide approach is needed to ensure public bodies have the skills they need.

Councils need to improve workforce planning

- Councils have yet to prepare detailed workforce plans that are clearly aligned with digital transformation plans and risk failing to build the capacity needed to meet their digital aims.

- Councils do not fully understand the number of staff nor the types of skills and job roles needed to support digital transformation.

- Workforce planning needs to be dynamic to take account of how new technologies will affect the workforce, such as the introduction of **automation** and **artificial intelligence (AI)**, and the need for more data specialists.

Fife Council's Organisational Development Strategy and Digital Strategy are clearly linked with a workforce plan in place. This includes the skillsets and culture changes required to support the Digital Strategy, as well as the changes to its technical architecture and supplier and customer engagement.

Our local government overview reports have highlighted that workforce planning is still being developed by councils, but that it is essential to ensure that councils have the staff, skills and leaders they need to deliver change and achieve strategic plans.

Automation: the use of technology to carry out a process without human operation.

Artificial Intelligence (AI): developing technology, such as a computer-controlled robot, to perform tasks commonly associated with intelligent beings, for example speech recognition, translation or decision-making.

Local government in Scotland Overview 2020
June 2020

Councils are 'growing their own' digital capacity and skills in a variety of ways

- Peer-to-peer support networks are supporting the adoption of new cloud-based tools and mobile working technology across council workforces.

- Dedicated digital skills teams are developing online resources and learning events.

- Events such as learning weeks or lunchtime drop-in training sessions are providing less formal learning opportunities for services to learn from one another.

- The representation of people from service teams on the governance boards of digital programmes is helping to transfer knowledge and share lessons between different parts of the council.

- Creating 'connector' roles within a council – that is people who can provide a bridge between digital and service teams – can help people understand what is needed from both a technical and business viewpoint during service design.

North Lanarkshire Council has put in place a network of Digital Transformers comprising 30 staff across different service areas who can assist in embedding digital skills. These Digital Transformers were early adopters of Office 365 and will be involved in the creation of learning materials and development opportunities to meet the needs identified by a skills survey.

Comhairle nan Eilean Siar is working with Skills Development Scotland and has developed a charter agreement for a school ICT apprenticeship programme. The council's aim is to fill skills gaps in the ICT workforce while providing opportunities for young people in island communities.

Working with business partners can accelerate digital transformation but councils still need their own expertise

- Councils are working with business partners to provide additional capacity, knowledge and expertise, and to fill skills gaps. Councils, however, still need to have sufficient internal expertise to drive their own strategy and make the right choices.

- Business partners can help councils build future capacity through knowledge exchange. This needs a structured approach involving, for instance, a knowledge transfer plan.

Glasgow City Council established a Strategic Innovation and Technology team to get the most out of the contract with its business partner. The team helps drive the digital strategy and provides in-house capacity across the four pillars of technology, business intelligence, innovation and working together.
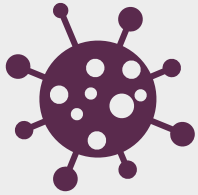
Covid-19 has changed how and where people work and councils have adapted well to support their workforce

Remote working
The Covid-19 pandemic has had a huge impact on council workforces, resulting in a large-scale shift to homeworking and remote working. Getting the right technology, skills and support in place to give staff the confidence to use new cloud-based tools has been key.

Digital and ICT teams response
Digital and ICT teams have responded with unprecedented speed, agility and resilience.

Workforce support
Support has been offered in different ways, such a one-to-one or via online learning resources. Through the Digital Office, the digital skills team at Perth and Kinross Council hosted webinars for other councils on supporting the remote workforce. They shared their experience of using collaboration tools such as Microsoft Teams, to continue service delivery and learning, host committee meetings and events with public participation.

Staff opinion
Councils have been surveying staff to find out what has and has not worked. This focus on skills and culture will need to remain, along with a continuing recognition that we are working in the most challenging of times.

Workforce planning and development
Councils will need to focus their efforts on building a digital culture and providing their workforces with the skills and support needed. The need for workforce planning is greater than ever as councils reshape their services and operating models.

Collaborative

Develops new ways of working together, sharing good practice and ideas across services and between councils and sectors, and involves citizens and communities

Collaboration is needed within councils to support council-wide change

- Ensuring continuity and coordination across services for citizens, and achieving more effective and efficient transformation are possible only when services work together to share learning, ideas and digital solutions.

- It is important that there are structures and resources put in place to support collaborative working across services and with digital teams.

- A collaborative and centralised approach allows more efficient deployment of digital technology.

Fife Council has a change network in place, with service representatives working together to identify common problems and find solutions.

Barriers

Organisational and cultural silos are commonplace in councils and are a barrier to collaboration. Technology contributes to this, with councils having different systems across services that do not easily connect and work together.

A lack of capacity, particularly in digital teams, is also a barrier to collaboration within councils.

The Digital Office has helped councils collaborate, share knowledge and innovate but its overall impact is not clear

- The key achievements of the **Digital Office** have been:
  - gaining commitment from all 32 councils
  - establishing a multi-disciplinary community working on digital projects
  - creating collaborative learning and sharing good practice.

- Nineteen councils have used the Digital Maturity Assessment tool developed by the Digital Office. This could be used more widely by councils to assess their progress and inform their digital plans.

- The Digital Office and Partnership programme is large and complex. It is not clear which projects have been of greatest value, there are differing views across councils as to its overall impact, and it is not clear who is accountable for delivery.

> **Collaborative learning has been supported through more than 50 Digital Office events.** Event topics include digital skills, innovation, service design, automation and AI, data, Agile, Office 365 and digital telecare. The Digital Office estimates that resources created to support councils implement the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) have saved £1 million across councils.

> **Digital Office:** launched in 2016 to support councils in becoming digital businesses by 2020. Its work programme has three themes: digital leadership, digital foundations and digital services.
> www.digitaloffice.scot

The Digital Office's current delivery model is not sufficient to deliver the pace of change required

- The Digital Office has a small core team funded through council subscriptions. The delivery model relies on different councils leading on projects, with some participating more actively than others.

- The Digital Office's delivery and funding model should be reviewed and its work programme focused on the priorities that councils have agreed for it.

Barriers

Not all councils have been able to free up the staff needed to engage with and gain value from working with the Digital Office. The large number of projects is difficult for smaller councils to commit to.

A refreshed digital strategy for Scotland provides an opportunity to set out a shared vision and priorities, and to clarify roles and responsibilities at national level

- Greater collective leadership and direction on overall digital strategy are needed. Some themes that emerged in our audit included:

  – no one is taking an aerial view

  – councils wanting a national direction on procurement and common platforms

  – councils wanting a single national repository of case studies and digital solutions.

- The refreshed digital strategy will help provide this but the roles and responsibilities of national organisations, specifically the Improvement Service and the Digital Office, need to be made clear.

- Stronger collective national leadership is required to help prioritise and coordinate activities between councils (and other sectors) to deliver the refreshed digital strategy.

> The Local Digital Declaration was launched in 2018 by the UK Ministry for Housing, Local Government and Communities, the Government Digital Service and a group of local authorities. It sets out a collective ambition based on five principles and a set of commitments that leaders and digital/IT teams have signed up to.

There are barriers to jointly procuring and sharing systems and developing common platforms

- The Digital Office and Partnership have not delivered on their original goal to deliver common platforms and joint procurement of systems, failing to meet council expectations.

- Senior-level agreement between councils is needed to identify the areas and services where common platforms would add most value.

- In October 2020, the Digital Office announced the launch of a national asset management platform which is intended to allow councils to make informed decisions about procurement of digital technology solutions. The Digital Office and Scotland Excel need to work with councils in using this platform for joint procurement and collaboration.

Examples of common platforms and systems used by councils include:

SEEMiS – the management information system used by the education departments of all Scottish councils. It is used for pupil and staff records, nursery applications, attendance, pastoral notes and communicating with external agencies.

Care case management system – Scotland Excel is currently managing procurement for common software solutions for case management in social work. Six councils are considering adopting this system as they replace legacy systems.

Barriers

Some commonly mentioned barriers across councils include:

– previous shared services initiatives that failed (prior to the establishment of the Digital Office)

– a lack of leadership direction and collective understanding of where common platforms would add most value

– an incomplete understanding of legacy systems and councils being at different stages in replacing them

– difficulties in the procurement of digital solutions, including agreeing on a shared specification and appointing providers

– risk aversion to adopting new or untried solutions.

Place-based strategies involving stakeholders from across a region are important in taking a more collaborative approach

- Regional networks and cross-sectoral partnerships are important for councils in planning coordinated services, and increasing knowledge and capacity. These include:

  - community hub developments through Community Planning Partnerships with the NHS, police and third sector

  - relationships with universities and the private sector developed through City and Region Growth Deals, providing opportunities to partner with those at the cutting edge of digital innovation in Scotland.

Clackmannanshire Council has identified opportunities for the digital transformation of social care services through its City Deal partnership, working with the University of Stirling and the private sector.

Barriers

A culture of collaboration is needed to get the best out of partnerships. Often, staff are not given enough time to meaningfully participate because of competing demands with their council day job.
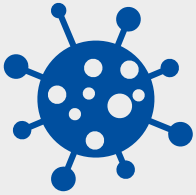
Covid-19 has brought greater collaboration across sectors as priorities and goals have become clearer and more aligned

Greater collaboration

Responding to the pandemic and the needs of vulnerable citizens has brought greater collaboration across services, and between councils and sectors. For example:

– Within councils, shared priorities have brought a flexible and rapid 'one council' response.

– Place-based strategies have become more important, with local partners, including the third sector and the NHS, working together to deliver a coordinated response to the needs of vulnerable and shielding groups.

– Collaborative working and data sharing across councils and sectors allowed the development of the Helping Hands platform to coordinate support for citizens who are shielding or vulnerable.

Digital Office Covid-support strategy

Councils have been engaging more with the Digital Office since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. The Digital Office revised its business plan and developed a new council Covid-support strategy based on supporting the 'response, recovery and renewal'. This has included:

– supporting the roll-out of homeworking solutions and negotiating trial licences from ICT vendors

– managing procurement for the Helping Hands platform

– setting up a cross-sector data-sharing task force.

Priorities

Key priorities for the Digital Office are becoming clearer, and this should help shape its future role and delivery model.

Technology and data enabled

Makes best use of digital technology to build common solutions that can be reused and shared to create better value for money. Uses and shares data securely to inform decision-making, enable joint services and achieve better outcomes for citizens.

Councils need to address legacy systems and put in place a more simplified technical architecture

- Councils need to understand the ICT and digital technology they have in place. They need a clear plan for addressing legacy systems to create a more standardised and simplified technical architecture and adopt common solutions.

- Centralised governance structures, technical assurance and common standards can help councils make the right decisions when investing in new systems.

North Lanarkshire Council is seeking new products or systems to align with Digital NL's aims, to maximise the reuse of existing solutions and integrate with the council's digital platform. The Enterprise Architecture Governance Working Group has been established to make sure that the right decisions are made.

Barriers

Councils are generally 'data rich, information poor', with data trapped in many legacy systems that are difficult to access, share between services or extract meaningful insights from.

Technology solutions including mobile working and cloud-based solutions require good connectivity. This is a real challenge for some councils, particularly in rural areas.

Digitally mature councils have digital strategies with a focus on data

- Councils are at an early stage of understanding how data can be better used to inform decisions, and understand user and community needs to achieve better outcomes.

- Digitally mature councils are developing data-driven strategies, **business intelligence** hubs and data management dashboards to make data more accessible and usable.

- Some councils are establishing open data platforms as a central place for all stakeholders to access data, taking an 'open by default 'approach.

Perth and Kinross Council is developing a data strategy with support from its business partner and refreshing its overall digital strategy to focus more on data. The strategy sets out the future direction for data and analytics within the council. Understanding the value of data and ensuring that trusted data is available to drive decisions and deliver better value are key principles. Key actions to support this include increasing data literacy, building a data platform for sharing data and working collaboratively, defining standards and controls to improve data quality, and putting in place standardised analytics tools across the council.

Glasgow City Council redesigned the delivery of school clothing grants to increase uptake from families living in poverty. The project used **data-matching** technology to merge data sets held across the council, to identify those eligible for a grant and give them automatic entitlement. The numbers of people receiving the grant increased from 22,000 to 30,000 as a result. This approach is now being developed on a Scotland-wide basis to maximise the take-up of benefits and address child poverty.

Business Intelligence: using technology to analyse data and create meaningful information about business operations or services which will support decision-making.

Data matching: comparing and if necessary, standardising two or more sets of data in order to use for analysis.

Councils need to put data governance frameworks in place

- Councils recognise that maximising the potential of data needs effective governance frameworks, but the development of common data standards and data ethics approaches are at an early stage.

- Councils should work with the Digital Office and Scottish Government in developing common data standards and a data ethics approach that are transparent, protect personal privacy, give people control and build public trust in how data is used.

- Councils need to comply with the **GDPR** and any data standards and governance frameworks must work within these requirements.

- Skills are needed to manage data, not just among data analysts and scientists but at a leadership level, so that data can be used effectively across the workforce.

GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation): is a legal framework that sets guidelines for the collection and processing of personal information. It has 7 key principles. It was introduced in May 2018.

The Scottish Government has tasked the DataLab with leading the development of Scotland's first AI strategy, which is scheduled to be published in early 2021.

The Scottish Government is also developing a framework and draft ethical digital Scotland strategy, which is scheduled to be published in July 2021. This will outline how Scotland will use digital technology, data and AI in ways that protect privacy, enhance security, and promote accessibility, inclusion and diversity.

Glasgow City Council is a member of the global network Cities for Digital Rights. Members commit to key principles including data protection. This means that everyone has the right to privacy and control over their personal information, and the right to know what happens to and who uses their data, and for what purposes.

Barriers

Cultural differences and a lack of trust have been barriers to increasing the degree of data sharing between services and sectors. Citizens also need to trust public sector organisations to handle their data securely.

A shortage of data skills is a barrier. Councils do not have sufficient numbers of people with the appropriate data literacy skills to make full use of and manage data.

Covid-19 has demonstrated the importance of data in understanding needs, making decisions and directing resources

Sharing data

The Covid-19 pandemic has demonstrated the benefits of sharing data to help solve a problem and inform decisions quickly. For example:

– The Helping Hands platform was developed to bring together data from councils and the NHS to coordinate support for members of the public on the shielding list.

– The Improvement Service used its Spatial Data Hub, which collates and quality assures over 50 data sets from all 32 councils, and has sourced additional data sets to support the Covid-19 response, such as dataset of distinct property types – GP surgeries, pharmacies and care homes.

– Councils reported that data-sharing agreements were reached with health boards and others, a process that would previously have taken a much longer period of time.

Improving the quality of data

A cross-sector data intelligence network has been set up in response to the pandemic and the need for more collaboration in using, sharing and improving the quality of data. It was initiated by the Digital Office but is now chaired by the Scottish Government. Members include COSLA, Public Health Scotland, Police Scotland, Scottish Enterprise, the Information Commissioners Office and representatives from academia.

Innovative

Has a culture of openness and improvement, looks outwards and explores how services can be delivered differently. Has the capacity, capability and processes in place to implement change.

Councils are at an early stage of developing the shared digital culture needed to support change and innovation

- A digital culture has:
  - an openness to doing things differently
  - permission to take risks, but understands the risk threshold
  - a 'fail fast, fail forward' ethos – taking an **agile** approach, doing things iteratively and in small steps, learning from mistakes and moving on
  - a willingness to explore the problem and possible solutions
  - an outward-looking approach with an understanding of the opportunities and risks that new technologies may bring.

- Some councils have dedicated initiatives to promoting innovation, such as innovation hubs.

Agile: an iterative approach to developing, testing and refining software or solutions in stages throughout a project, rather than developing one whole solution over a longer timespan.

Clackmannanshire Council has 'Be the innovator' as one of its corporate values. This sets out a commitment to 'look outwards, be proactive about improvement and strive always for innovation and inclusive growth'.

Barriers

Councils can have a culture that is cautious and risk averse. This can result in a resistance to change and a fear of trying new ways of working and new systems.

People need to be outward looking and be given the space and time to innovate

- Resource pressures can make it difficult to give staff the time and space needed to explore new ways of doing things and test things out.

- Looking outwards to learn from others and work in partnership is important in stimulating innovation.

- Collaboration across sectors and regions is offering an opportunity for councils to learn and innovate. Councils have been learning from local authorities in Scotland and in other parts of the UK and further afield, sharing learning materials and undertaking study visits.

- Councils need to understand the opportunities and risks that new technology such as AI and IoT can bring; this requires the right skills and networks.

CivTech: Scottish Government programme launched in 2016. It aims to bring the public sector and innovative businesses together to develop solutions to public sector problems.

Case study 6
Enabling digital government
June 2019

Fife Council has established an innovation hub that has a small fund to help develop business cases and works with suppliers to test the feasibility of new approaches, using a 'prove and explore' approach.

Glasgow City Council has an Innovation Strategy that provides a framework for innovative ideas to progress. Innovation projects include work with the Centre for Civic Innovation to complete a challenge addressing how technology can support independent living and tackle common problems such as false alarm call outs and unreliable sensors. The Health and Social Care Partnership has formed partnerships with industry through this challenge, increasing its understanding of what technology is available.

A growing number of councils have set CivTech challenges to find innovative solutions to problems they have faced. The Digital Office featured examples of such challenges, including the case of Stirling Council, in a webinar it hosted.

Barriers
New smart-place technologies such as AI and IoT need good connectivity.

Councils are using different approaches to support transformation but this requires skills that are in short supply

- Council business analysts are using established methods such as **LEAN** and **business process re-engineering** to increase efficiency across services.

- Agile methods are becoming more widely used and are taking an iterative approach to developing solutions.

- Methods that are not yet widely used include:

  – open innovation methods, including **problem-based procurement**, where public bodies work with suppliers to procure solutions to challenges, for example CivTech.

  – Service design (page 16).

North Lanarkshire Council is taking an 'agile' approach to transforming services as part of its Digital NL programme. This involves an iterative process of business analysis and consultation with staff groups to develop and test solutions that meet users' needs.

Perth and Kinross Council has trained teams in Agile, with senior staff trained in Agile for leaders. It has created a 'Principles in Agile' document to support its use across the council.

LEAN: an approach to designing or developing solutions based on principles that maximise value and minimise waste.

Business process re-engineering: exploring an existing process or service and re-designing it from the start, to make it more efficient or add more value for the user.

Problem-based procurement: buying a solution developed by a supplier to solve a challenge or issue. In traditional procurement a product is purchased which has been developed to pre-determined specifications.

Barriers

Councils do not have sufficient staff with the appropriate skills to transform and improve services.

Traditional procurement can take time, which discourages small innovative suppliers from getting involved with public-sector bodies.

Covid-19 has encouraged a culture of innovation that councils need to further develop as they move into a phase of renewal

Rapid response
Councils had to respond rapidly to Covid-19, putting new services in place and supporting staff to work from home. Examples include:

– developing apps for families to help them stay in contact with relatives in care homes

– online booking for recycling centres

– virtual tours of art galleries.

Increased openness
Covid-19 resulted in increased openness – partly through necessity – among councils trying new things and working collaboratively in responding to the shared challenges brought about by the outbreak.

Agile methods
Agile methods have been used and there is growing interest in user-focused design. Councils need to build on these innovative methods to support further change and the capacity to transform.

Digital progress in local government

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