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Technology Review Feedback

Denbighshire County Council

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The person who delivered the work was Andrew Doughton.

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Contents

Summary report	4
High-level questions and findings	5

Summary report

1. Effective use of technology is essential for transforming the delivery of public services, improving outcomes for citizens and delivering efficiency savings. Technology can support different ways of working, delivering services and engaging with citizens, enabling councils to deliver more for less. The way in which technology is delivered and managed has a direct impact on the efficiency, effectiveness and quality of work undertaken across the council and affects almost every council worker. Poor ICT governance can lead to the use of inappropriate systems, system unavailability and frustration throughout the organisation.
2. In 2010, the Wales Audit Office identified that many local authorities were grappling with ensuring technology was used effectively to support service transformation and achieve efficiency savings, and as a result, reviews of technology are being undertaken at all councils in Wales.
3. This review sought to answer the question: **‘Are the council’s arrangements for developing, using and supporting technology likely to support continuous improvement?’** Our review of Denbighshire County Council (the Council) concluded that:
 - The Council’s arrangements for developing, using and supporting technology are likely to support continuous improvement once the Council further strengthens its ICT governance arrangements and successfully completes Phase 1 of its ICT Strategy:
 - ICT governance arrangements do not fully align with and support the delivery of the Council’s improvement and transformation priorities and there are weaknesses in technology resourcing arrangements that need to be addressed; and
 - the Council has focused on developing customer access channels which are starting to perform well, but is not fully exploiting the potential of technology to deliver service transformation and efficiencies and it needs to develop arrangements to demonstrate a return on its technology investments.
4. Our findings, conclusions, and proposals for improvement are outlined in the table below.

High-level questions and findings

High-level question	Are the Council's arrangements for developing, using and supporting technology likely to support continuous improvement?
High-level answer: We have concluded that:	The Council's arrangements for developing, using and supporting technology are likely to support continuous improvement once the Council further strengthens its ICT governance arrangements and successfully completes Phase 1 of its ICT Strategy.
Assessment of current arrangements	ICT governance arrangements do not fully align with and support the delivery of the Council's improvement and transformation priorities and there are weaknesses in technology resourcing arrangements that need to be addressed.
Assessment of performance	The Council has focused on developing customer access channels which are starting to perform well, but is not fully exploiting the potential of technology to deliver service transformation and efficiencies, and it needs to develop arrangements to demonstrate a return on its technology investments.
Proposals for improvement	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ensure that the ICT Strategy is comprehensive including wider services technology and systems needs. This could, for example, take the form of the development of a corporate and service level strategy implementation plan as part of phases 2 and 3 of the strategy. 2. The Council should ensure alignment between plans for creating efficiencies through greater use of technology with funding requirements and ICT workforce plans. Development of the business consultant role should be adequately resourced to enable alignment of plans and sustainable funding requirements. 3. The Council should also ensure that funding for infrastructure is sustainable and able to meet future needs. 4. Reduce the total cost of ownership by a review of ICT desktop technology funding arrangements treating them as a corporate commodity funded centrally linked to a refresh programme and medium-term financial plans. 5. Ensure that technology projects across all the Council's services are effectively reviewed, to determine planned or actual business improvement achieved and return on investment. 6. The Council should ensure that the information systems or new technology needs of collaborative projects and plans are formally communicated to the ICT Service, to ensure that the service can effectively prioritise its programme of work.

High-level question	Are the Council's arrangements for developing, using and supporting technology likely to support continuous improvement?	
Proposals for improvement	7. The Council collects basic information relating to channel use, but it needs to collect focussed information relating to the cost of transactions across the different access channels to establish baseline performance information and then regularly monitor the usage and cost, and use this to inform decision making and prioritisation.	
Findings	Yes or No	Because:
Are the Council's technology <i>plans</i> likely to support its improvement priorities?	In part	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council is in the process of developing an ICT Strategy for 2012-14. The Head of Customer Services is responsible for the production and delivery of the ICT Strategy, but has taken an approach in strategy development which engages corporate and Service management. The Senior Leadership Team is responsible for endorsing the strategy and ensuring it is in line with Council objectives and available investment. The strategy is split into three phases; the first (foundation phase) has been funded, but later phases will require funding approval, once progress has been achieved with phase 1. • The delivery of the Strategy will be overseen and monitored both through formal governance/scrutiny functions, service performance management, and through the business transformation programme board. Implementation of the strategy will be in three phases (building a fit-for-purpose ICT foundation, implementing the programme of work and required project governance structures, ICT Services delivered in collaboration). • The draft strategy covers the development of the infrastructure and corporate 'enabler' requirements, for example mobile working, information management as well the collaborative agenda. The strategy does not identify specific technology requirements within services, although there is recognition within the ICT service that the business consultant role is increasingly important for facilitating technology improvements in services. • There is a formal process for identification of ICT projects: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Through the business transformation programme; and - Service-based technology priorities through the evolving business partner role where an ICT service consultant works with services to understand their current and future business requirements. This helps to define and prioritise ICT projects.

Findings	Yes or No	Because:
<p>Are the Council's technology <i>plans</i> likely to support its improvement priorities?</p>	<p>In part</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recently introduced project mandate processes, with weighting and priority monitored on a quarterly basis. • The Council is committed to collaboration although the form and function of collaboration are currently unclear for a number of services. There are also ranges of ICT-specific collaboration activities which are progressing. The Head of Customer Services is engaged in both regional and national discussions about a collaborative approach for sharing common infrastructure regionally. • Arrangements to support effective delivery of the ICT strategy include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – the ICT Strategic forum which is the 'Progress through technology group'; – the ICT Operational Group co-ordinates day-to-day ICT Service activity and operational level issues and opportunities in services; and – the Technical Design Authority is an ICT service group which is responsible for defining and documenting technical standards. • The Council accepts that investment in ICT/technology can help it achieve service transformation and has committed investment for the foundation phase of the strategy. Further commitment for funding subsequent stages of the strategy is likely to be more dependent on demonstrable efficiencies and the likelihood of achieving business benefits and return on investment. • ICT staff resources have reduced to a minimum required baseline. The ICT staff resources to support day-to-day operational delivery are sufficient. However, ICT workforce plans need to develop to ensure adequate skilled resources are available to support the Council's technology-enabled business improvement aims without degrading the quality of ICT service provision or delaying project delivery. Insufficient capacity or technical skills could limit the extent to which technology can effectively enable improvement and collaboration at the required pace.

Findings	Yes or No	Because:
<p>Are the Council's technology <i>delivery arrangements</i> likely to support continuous improvement?</p>	<p>In part</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council plans to use technology to enable business transformation and to achieve its financial savings, through improved customer access and service improvement but its approach to funding technology development limits the potential to which technology can effectively enable improvement. The Council takes a traditional service-based approach rather than a corporate approach to investing in technology. ICT developments and initiatives are determined by the availability of funds and within service budgets, which is not the most effective way to use technology to transform service delivery. The Council uses earmarked annualised capital funding arrangements to ensure that the ICT infrastructure is sustainable, routine maintenance is from the ICT revenue. This is an annual earmarked fund, although it is not specifically linked to medium-term financial plans. • The Council's policies are current and clearly outline how technology is to be deployed, used and exploited. The Technical Design Authority has progressed well with formalising current standards. The Council is compliant with the UK Government Connect Secure Extranet (GCSX), a secure wide-area network that allows officials at local public sector organisations to interact and share data privately and securely with central government departments. • Desk top devices and software are funded from devolved service budgets, which is not the most efficient and cost-effective way of managing desktop technology. Desktop refresh is recommended at four years. Desktop technology is an essential component of almost every aspect of work, and its unavailability or poor performance has a detrimental impact on staff productivity. Treating the desktop as a corporate commodity and adopting a standard lifespan linked to the total cost of ownership of the desktop would enable the Council to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – define and manage structured replacement programmes; – plan bulk purchases, thereby achieving economies of scale; – ensure a consistent standard of provision across the Council; – minimise ICT support overheads; and – remove the overhead of preparing, challenging and approving business cases.

Findings	Yes or No	Because:
Are the Council's technology <i>delivery arrangements</i> likely to support continuous improvement?	In part	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The ICT Service works to a risk management framework. A systematic approach to risk management has been developed to enable the department to identify, evaluate, control and monitor risks that could present strategic or tactical threats to the department. There is a corporate risk management approach which follows the service structure. Technology risks from within other services are identified via their risk management processes and these do not currently formally link back into Customer Services. The technology risks from other services are identified by ICT through more informal approaches, although the planned focus on the business account role may help alleviate this issue. • The ICT Service has programme and project management arrangements in place, based upon Prince 2 principles which are scalable. • The Council is effectively managing the procurement and maintenance of its ICT assets. All technology procurement is through the central ICT Service using the Council's procurement framework. The ICT department uses software to assess the currency and licensing of its software base.
Is the Council using technology as an <i>enabler</i> for transformation and substantial savings on running costs?	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council does not have a strong track record of analysing and demonstrating business benefits and return on investment achieved on service technology projects. • The Council focuses on moving customer transactions to more affordable and effective means (channel shift) to improve business processes, using technology to fundamentally rethink how services are accessed by customers in order to improve customer service and cut operational costs. It has a customer contact service that enables transactions and enquiries face to face, by telephone or using the internet, underpinned by a CRM system. The Council's website offers a wide range of self-service facilities and is further integrating service-based processes and systems into the corporate contact centre. This includes support of social inclusion such as access for the disabled, is bilingual and supports mobile devices. • The Council is also starting to exploit the potential of other aspects of technology such as EDRMS, Customer Relationship Management and Geographical Information System to achieve back-office service transformation and further efficiencies.

Findings	Yes or No	Because:
Is the Council using technology as an <i>enabler</i> for transformation and substantial savings on running costs?	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council is currently implementing central shared storage technology to rationalise the Council's storage devices for the Council's information and data and, in the long term, improving resilience. • The Council is planning to exploit technology to introduce more flexibility in how employees are empowered and enabled to work, at home, on site, or in customers' homes. In some service areas this is currently in place and delivering improvements. • The Council is starting to use technology to reduce printing costs and improve quality through printer rationalisation. The aim of these activities combined is to change the culture of the Council, significantly reduce printers, and generate savings. • The Council is not currently taking a corporate approach to releasing funds through effective management of its applications although this is planned through wider collaboration. • The Council is committed to green ICT, and plans to significantly reduce power requirements by the end of the 2011-12 financial year.
Is the Council effectively monitoring and evaluating technology improvement and performance?	In part	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SOCITM key performance indicators are calculated and returned to SOCITM as part of the SOCITM Cymru benchmarking exercise. They are used to monitor operational performance of the ICT Service through quarterly performance challenge by the Head of Service. • The Council does not have a strong track record of monitoring the impact and efficiency of technology projects in services, making it difficult to fully evaluate the performance/efficiency improvements arising from investment in technology. However, this is improving; pre-implementation forecasts of savings have been identified for the WorkSmart and pilot EDRMS project. The ICT Service energy saving project is demonstrating tangible efficiencies. • The Council undertakes, and has learnt from, post-project learning exercises, such as the intranet project. • The Council demonstrates improving arrangements for learning from others and has visited other sites to learn from their way of working. The IT department also undertakes post-project evaluations.

Findings	Yes or No	Because:
Is the Council effectively monitoring and evaluating technology improvement and performance?	In part	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council is developing ways in which it can monitor and manage its channel access; currently it has limited baseline information. • The Council has brought in suppliers in a number of instances to demonstrate what different technologies are available and how they could potentially improve service delivery and efficiency. • Formal ICT governance arrangements are through: the appointed member portfolio representative, who demonstrates a good understanding of ICT; Corporate Governance Committee; and Performance Scrutiny Committee. Officer accountability is through the Senior Leadership Team, Corporate Executive Team and Progress through Technology Group. Technology projects which link to the improvement and efficiency programme are managed and monitored through the Business Transformation Programme. The corporate strategic technology group, called the 'Progress through Technology Group' provides management links to other services. • There is no overarching governance function for technology use and exploitation which encompasses all of the Council's technology needs. There is no corporate approach to monitoring the effectiveness of the Council's use of technology; this is devolved to the general scrutiny and governance for services. ICT Service accountability is through the Senior Leadership Team, Corporate Executive Team and Progress through Technology Group.



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