ADUR & WORTHING
COUNCILS

Joint Strategic Committee
7 December 2023

Key Decision [Yes]

Ward(s) Affected: All

Digital Rapid Improvement Programme - Impact Report

Report by the Director for Sustainability & Resources

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Executive Summary

1. Purpose

1.1. This report aims to offer members a thorough summary of the Digital Rapid Improvement Programme's progress from April 2023 onwards. It seeks to provide an update on the savings achieved thus far and a cumulative projection for future years.

1.2. To demonstrate the programme's value and its critical importance going forward as the Councils continue to undertake significant organisational redesign with the need to create simplified and digitised processes and systems that reduce costs and improve resident experience.

1.3. To test the introduction of artificial intelligence as a digital capability that could generate significant improvements, efficiencies and improved resident experience, while ensuring safety and adherence to information governance and cyber-security standards.

2. Recommendations

2.1. The Joint Strategic Committee is invited to consider the following recommendations in relation to the ongoing implementation of the Digital Rapid Improvement Programme:

2.2. The Joint Strategic Committee is recommended to
(i) Acknowledge the current 5-year forecasts.
(ii) Acknowledge the proposed savings.
(iii) Support the allocation of an additional £250k to fund the resources required to support the Rapid Improvement Programme for the fiscal year 2024/25, with an estimated payback period of 3 years.

3. Context

3.1. Background

3.1.1. In light of the need for swift and substantial digital transformation, essential for supporting the 2023/24 budget plan and ongoing into 2024/25 and beyond, the Digital Rapid Improvement Programme has been established to provide additional dedicated transformation capacity, providing the necessary resources to expedite rapid change. Leveraging our strong in-house expertise and low-code digital development foundations, in December 20222, the Councils agreed to invest in additional personnel and skills to enable the Digital Rapid Improvement Programme. This digital transformation initiative is foundational in realising our goals of resilience and organisational adaptability, as articulated in 'Our Plan.'

3.1.2. The inception of the Rapid Improvement team in early 2023 introduced a multidisciplinary group with specific objectives:

3.1.2.1. Enhancing our service design and business analysis proficiency alongside our in-house development team.

3.1.2.2. Stepping into services to facilitate swift process transformation and infusing innovation into change.

3.1.2.3. Ultimately, enhancing the efficiency of our service teams to realise budget savings, alongside improved customer experience.

3.1.3. Our work program encompasses areas of transformation where we can achieve tangible financial savings and endeavours aimed at unlocking performance benefits, funding opportunities, cost reduction,

and enhancing the customer experience.

3.1.4. The team was fully assembled by June 2023 and has already collaborated with various teams, including:

- Revenues & Benefits
- People & Change (HR)
- Technical Services
- Fraud
- Waste Services
- Housing Needs
- Parks and Foreshore
- Community Support
- Adur Homes

3.2. **Financial savings & resilience**

3.2.1. **Revenues & Benefits**: Implemented online change of address forms for residents and landlords, automation of manual processes, and process enhancements to save time and enhance the customer experience. Supported the implementation of the new debt policy. This has resulted in a total revenue saving across Revenues and benefits, Customer Services, and Business Support of approximately £37,523 per year.

3.2.2. **Fraud**: Created and implemented a new fraud case management system that has generated a total revenue saving of £24,370 per year.

3.2.3. **Technical Services**: Developed and implemented a replacement work order management system and reducing printing and postage costs has led to a total revenue saving of £9,704 per year.

3.3. **Unlocking funding**

3.3.1. **Social Prescribing**: Enabled case-based data to support external funding bids for 2.3 FTE (£111k) to prevent service reduction and avoid redundancy costs.

3.4. **Cost avoidance**

3.4.1. **Adur Homes**: Assisted with systems work to enhance the printing of rent accounts, as well as rent and service charge management, has the potential to avoid a loss of income in the region of £75k

3.5. **Improving Customer Experience**

3.5.1. A single example of introducing the change of address online form for council tax now saves the customer nearly 12.5 minutes vs. doing this over the phone. It has led to 88% of residents rating it easy or very easy to complete. By introducing this to our website now 58% of move forms are completed online, allowing residents to do this at any time that suits them. Resident feedback: *"Much easier to sort than I anticipated, very plain English and easy to use"*

3.6. **Additional Savings for Q4 2023**

3.6.1. In addition to the savings realised thus far this year, we anticipate further cost reductions of approximately £20k from the following areas:

3.6.1.1. **Revenues & Benefits:** We project additional savings by further automating manual processes and summons checks.

3.6.1.2. **Parks & Foreshore:** Optimising and digitising current workflows and systems for the handling of enquiries to reduce the volume we get, make the ones we do receive easier to handle and improve customer experience. There are a number of internal processes that can be optimised, for example the potential of daily time savings through the digitisation of vehicle checks.

3.6.1.3. **Adur Homes:** Additional savings will result from automating compliance data processing, consolidating 15 sheets and 3 systems into one. We also anticipate reducing repair administration time through usability improvements and eliminating an 8-month printing backlog, enabling further recovery action.

3.6.1.4. **Business Support:** Further cost reductions are expected from the automation of indexing Revenues & Benefits emails via a contact form, potentially reducing the workload by approximately 3 hours per week.

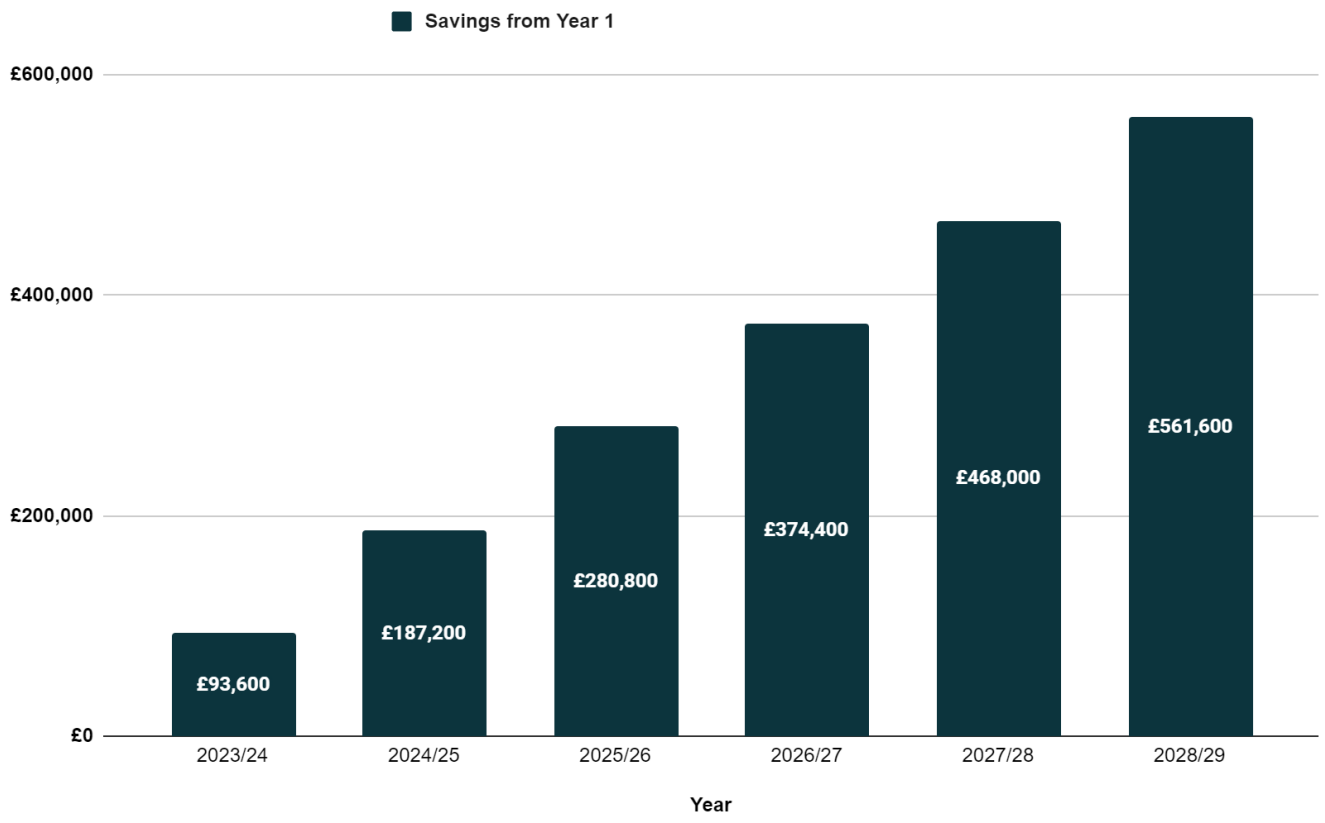
3.6.1.5. **Waste - Dog Bins:** Digitising the current paper-based dog bin rounds. This will provide data to enable route optimisation, opportunity for enhanced customer service when reporting a problem and anticipated savings of 15-30 minutes daily for the administration team through reduced duplication and checking. This will also lay the foundations for digitising street cleansing and litter bin collections where there is further potential for optimisation and customer service enhancement.

3.7. **Investment and future financial projections**

3.7.1. The total achieved and predicted savings for 2023/24 is £93,600. This is strong performance, especially considering the team startup time, recruitment and upskilling. This will mean that the initial investment of £191,000 will nearly be realised by the end of 2024/25, i.e. in two years, with ongoing annual savings.

This is detailed in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1. Cumulative Financial Savings



3.7.2. With the current budget position, it is imperative that we can support services to move to the future faster, reduce workloads, increase income and enhance customer experience. Several new work streams have been identified and aligned to organisational design priorities.

3.7.2.1. **Resident Services**

3.7.2.1.1. **Customer Services** - understanding how we can reduce call volumes, make internal processes more efficient and enable Customer Services staff to focus

on calls where human interaction is crucial

3.7.2.1.2. **Revenues & Benefits** - further work to understand how processes can be automated or changed, and the cost of printing reduced

3.7.2.1.3. **Complaints** - system and process review and upgrade to help teams better handle complaints

3.7.2.1.4. **Website - paper form review** - Reviewing where we currently still have paper forms available to download on our website and exploring how these can be digitised

3.7.2.2. **Neighbourhood model**

3.7.2.2.1. **Waste & cleansing** - Digitising street cleansing and litter bin collections to increase efficiency and customer service

3.7.2.2.2. **Regenerative Development & Parks** - developing and expanding the Estates app into Parks & Foreshore, enhancing capabilities and increasing efficiency

3.7.2.3. **Planning** - Idox system implementation (invest to save)

3.7.2.4. **Core Services**

3.7.2.4.1. **Finance** - an automated financial planning tool, building on the service planning tool to provide improved data and greater resilience

3.7.2.4.2. **Procurement** - combined form for procurement, legal, digital and finance to increase efficiency

3.7.2.4.3. **Access database review** - reviewing current Access databases and exploring how they can be brought across to other systems to be more efficient, secure and resilient

3.7.2.5. **Income generation**

3.7.2.5.1. **Commercial waste:** System upgrade to reduce manual work and increase efficiency, to unlock potential for revenue growth

3.7.2.5.2. **Community Alarm:** New system to replace old Access database. Enable the team to become more resilient and unlock potential for revenue growth

4. Issues for consideration

4.1. Resource Requirements for Sustained Progress

4.1.1. To uphold the momentum of our ongoing rapid improvement program, an additional investment of £250k is necessary to support cost savings in the 24/25 fiscal year. Based on current savings made, it is predicted this will pay back within 3 years. It is imperative that we persevere with our Digital program to continue enhancing the efficiency of the services we've already addressed, as elaborated in section 3.1.4. Further budget pressures and substantial work identified through organisational design will need to be addressed to yield financial savings and enhanced customer experience.

4.1.2. The rapid improvement team comprises a diverse set of professionals, featuring a blend of permanent, revenue-funded staff and specialised, capital-funded Fixed-Term Contract (FTC) positions.

4.1.3. The different roles within the team are crucial to ensuring that we are developing solutions that can successfully optimise internal processes and resilience, alongside delivering an enhanced customer experience. We take a human-centred approach, working initially in a discovery phase to fully understand the problem we are trying to solve, the scope, what we want to achieve, and what the potential solutions are. We explore all the steps in the journey from end to end, understanding what the experience is for a customer and our internal processes. Once we have understood the problem space and potential solutions, we move into a development stage where we prototype, get feedback and iterate on the solution to ensure we got it right.

4.1.4. The presence of these FTC positions within the Rapid Improvement Team is pivotal to creating the additional capacity beyond “business as usual”, maintaining the swift development and technical implementation of any digital solutions within our services. These roles have played a crucial role in facilitating digital transformation and process improvements across our services, ensuring we can continue to reap the benefits of enhanced efficiency and cost savings.

4.2. Developing our approach in 2023/24

4.2.1. **Working with the People & Change team:** The new People & Change function is being developed, with the appointment of the new AD People & Change. We will be developing our approach to design, delivery and change alongside the People & Change team. The aim is to bring product management skills into services, so they can monitor performance, create a backlog for future change and iterate on the design.

4.2.2. **Developing our approach to data:** In 2022/23 we have worked to improve performance data with some teams. This has included improving data reporting around damp and mould, and compliance for Adur Homes, and creating a data dashboard to understand the Revenues team backlog and customer contact. In 2023/24 we want to do more to enable the teams we are working with to monitor performance and identify any areas for improvement. This is also closely linked to the development of product management skills mentioned in section 4.2.1. We want to focus on supporting services to understand:

- how their service is performing
- what their key metrics are
- what opportunities are there for real-time public data, to inform the public better and reduce failure demand

4.2.3. **Developing our approach to user testing:** The rapid improvement team takes a human-centred approach to our work. We do not have a dedicated user research role within the team, and much of this work is done by our Service Designers. However, we recognise that there is more that we can do to ensure our services are designed around the people that use them and aim to develop our approach to user testing further in 2023/24

4.3. Future Technology (AI)

4.3.1. Embracing artificial intelligence (AI) represents a revolutionary prospect for local authorities, offering the potential to refine our operational procedures and deliver more efficient, effective services to our communities. By harnessing the capabilities of AI, we can liberate precious officer hours, streamline resource allocation, and elevate our decision-making processes. This presents an exhilarating opportunity to leverage AI tools, catalysing our transformation journey and bolstering our technological capabilities, enhancing our development on the existing low code platform, Liberty Create.

4.3.2. We will explore these opportunities within Liberty Create in the next 12 months. We will be seeking financial support for further AI development in December 2024, depending on the outcome of our

initial discovery work.

4.3.3. AI can be utilised in many ways to assist the way we work; the LGA has recently launched the "***LGA AI Network"*** which brings together all local authorities to support the use cases, benefits realisation and ensure data security through the design, build and implementation of all new AI.

4.3.3.1. **Automated Administrative Tasks**: AI can automate routine administrative tasks like data entry, paperwork processing, and appointment scheduling. This enables local authorities to redirect human resources to more complex and value-added activities, reducing the administrative burden on officers.

4.3.3.2. **Data Analysis and Prediction**: AI-powered analytics can process vast amounts of data to identify trends, anticipate future needs, and detect anomalies or potential issues. By leveraging predictive analytics, local authorities can allocate resources more efficiently and proactively address community needs.

4.3.3.3. **Data-Driven Decision Making**: AI provides local authorities with data-driven insights to inform policy decisions, resource allocation, and long-term planning. It ensures that decisions are based on real-time, accurate information, leading to more effective governance.

4.3.3.4. **Improved Citizen Services**: AI-driven chatbots and virtual assistants can enhance citizen interactions by providing quick and accurate responses to enquiries, facilitating online transactions, and guiding residents through bureaucratic processes. This can significantly improve the quality of services and has a large scope for freeing up officer time in our customer services team.

4.3.3.5. **Cost Savings:** Implementing AI technologies can lead to substantial cost savings in the long run. Local authorities can make their operations more cost-effective by automating tasks, optimising resource allocation, and reducing the risk of errors by streamlining many different admin-related tasks this can free up valuable resources.

4.3.3.6. Investing in AI is a strategic move for local authorities to streamline operations, optimise resource utilisation, and free up valuable officer time. By automating administrative tasks, improving data analysis, enhancing citizen services, and

making more informed decisions, local governments can better serve their communities, foster innovation, and drive economic growth, all while ensuring a more efficient and effective public sector.

5. Engagement and Communication

5.1. The Corporate Leadership team has been engaged during the creation of this report.

5.2. The Councils' Cabinets have received presentations to overview the success of the programme so far

6. Financial Implications

6.1. £250k Investment is being requested to sustain the programme into 24/25. The cost to be included as an investment in services commitment within the Joint Services budget preparation as a shared cost to Adur and Worthing Council.

6.2. The cost of investment, if approved, will be met by utilising the uncommitted growth allocation within the 2024/25 budget in both Adur and Worthing of £100k and £150k respectively.

7. Legal Implications

7.1. Under Section 111 of the Local Government Act 1972, the Council has the power to do anything that is calculated to facilitate, or which is conducive or incidental to, the discharge of any of their functions.

7.2. s1 of the Localism Act 2011 empowers the Council to do anything an individual can do apart from that which is specifically prohibited by pre-existing legislation

7.3. Section 3(1) of the Local Government Act 1999 (LGA 1999) contains a general duty on a best value authority to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness.

Background Papers

- 2022.12.05 - WorthingJSSC - Budget Update 2022/23
- 2022.12.06 - Adur JSSC - Budget Update 2022/23

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Sustainability & Risk Assessment

1. Economic

- **Cost Savings:** The programme has resulted in substantial savings across various departments, such as Revenues and benefits, Fraud, Technical Services, and Adur Homes. These savings amount to approximately £93,600 for the fiscal year 2023/24, with ongoing annual savings. These savings are crucial in optimising resource allocation and potentially freeing funds for other areas or investments.

- **Revenue Generation and Avoidance:** Beyond cost savings, the programme has helped unlock funding through social prescribing, avoid potential income losses in areas like Adur Homes, and potentially increase revenue through improved systems in commercial waste and community alarm services.

- The economic impact of the Digital Rapid Improvement Programme extends beyond direct cost savings. It encompasses efficiency gains, revenue opportunities, and improved customer experiences, and lays the groundwork for future technological advancements, all of which contribute to a more efficient and effective public sector.

2. Social

- Matter was considered, and no issues were identified.

2.1 Social Value

- Matter was considered, and no issues were identified.

2.2 Equality Issues

- **Digital Exclusion:** The increase in digital solutions could inadvertently widen the divide as not all residents or employees may have equal access to technology. This does give the opportunity to allow teams more time and give better support to the people who need it most.

- **Service Accessibility and Usability:** If digital solutions are not designed with diverse user needs in mind, they might not be equally accessible or usable for everyone. This could affect marginalised groups, the elderly, or those with disabilities, potentially excluding them from benefiting fully from the services offered.

    - **Mitigation**
        - ***Inclusive Design****: Ensuring that digital solutions are designed with diverse user needs, considering accessibility standards and conducting user testing with diverse groups.*

- ***Training and Support****: Providing adequate training and support to employees to bridge skill gaps and ensure everyone can effectively use new technologies.*

- ***Data Governance and Bias Mitigation****: Implementing robust data governance practices and actively mitigating biases in algorithms and AI systems.*

- ***Regular Assessment and Feedback****: Continuously monitoring the impact of changes on different demographics, collecting feedback, and making adjustments to address any identified inequalities.*

- These proposals have been developed concerning the Equality Act 2010. No proposals contained within the proposals would require a detailed Equalities Impact Assessment.

2.3 Community Safety Issues (Section 17)

- Matter was considered, and no issues were identified.

2.4 Human Rights Issues

- Matter was considered, and no issues were identified.

3. Environmental

- Matter considered, and no issues identified.

4. Governance

- The Rapid Improvement Team reports to the Tech & Change Board to track progress and risks