

Agenda – Local Government and Housing Committee

Meeting Venue:

Committee Room 5, Tŷ Hywel

Meeting date: 12 February 2025

Meeting time: 09.00

For further information contact:

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Committee Clerk

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Private pre-meeting

08.45 – 09.00

1 Introductions, apologies, substitutions and declarations of interest

09.00

2 Digital Local Government: Evidence session 1

09.00 – 09.40

(Pages 1 – 35)

Harriet Green, Joint CEO, Centre for Digital Public Services

Myra Hunt, Joint CEO, Centre for Digital Public Services

Break

09.40 – 09.45

3 Digital Local Government: Evidence session 2

09.45 – 10.25

(Pages 36 – 39)

Tim Buckle, Audit Manager, Audit Wales

Andrew Strong, Audit Manager, Audit Wales

Stephen Lisle, Audit Manager, Audit Wales

Break

10.25 – 10.30

4 Digital Local Government: Evidence session 3

10.30 – 11.10

(Pages 40 – 44)



Jonathan Carr–West, Chief Executive Officer, Local Government Information Unit

Jocelle Lovell, Director of Inclusive Communities, Cwmpas

Marc Davies, Lead Consultant: Digital, Cwmpas

Break

11.10 – 11.15

5 Digital Local Government: Evidence session 4

11.15 – 12.15

(Pages 45 – 74)

Lindsey Phillips, Interim Chief Digital Officer

Councillor Dimitri Batrouni, Leader of Newport City Council, Welsh Local Government Association

Councillor Neil Prior, Pembrokeshire County Council, Welsh Local Government Association

6 Papers to note

12.15

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6.1 Letter from Propertymark in relation to the private rented sector

(Pages 76 – 77)

6.2 Letter from Y Llywydd in relation to the Business Committee's review of the Public Bill and Member Bill process

(Pages 78 – 81)

6.3 Letter from the Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Energy and Planning in relation to the use of UK government funding for city and regional growth deals

(Page 82)

6.4 Letter from Petitions Committee in relation to Petition P–06–1483 Give neighbours their say when holiday let owners start applying for licences

(Page 83)

Private meeting

12.15 – 12.30

7 Motion under Standing Order 17.42 (ix) to resolve to exclude the public from the remainder of this meeting

12.15

8 Digital Local Government: Consideration of evidence

12.15 – 12.30

Document is Restricted

Digital Local Government Inquiry

The Centre for Digital Public Services (CDPS) was set up in 2020 by the Welsh Government to support the public sector in Wales to design and deliver better public services.

We support them to:

- Meet the [Digital Service Standard for Wales](#)
- Learn digital skills, through formal training and expert webinars. We develop and support leaders via the [digital leadership academy](#)
- Connect with other digital professionals through our 6 [communities of practice](#) and our programme of events
- Deliver practical digital improvements, with CDPS 'squads' working on cross-sector projects

1. Current use of digital to design and improve public service provision around the needs of users

We have a digital landscape across local government in Wales that is very varied. Although the services delivered may have much in common, each organisation has made their own way to digitisation. There are a myriad of different systems and different delivery approaches.

Partial digitisation has in some areas led to dual spend – investment in digital systems but with parallel manual fulfilment still required.

Globally, best practice for good user experiences, and more economical service delivery, depends on teams taking standard approaches, sharing common technology and ensuring services are viewed as end-to-end processes.

But the organic growth of digitisation across Welsh local government has made this good practice difficult. Many leaders have talked to CDPS about their wish to “stop doing things 22 different ways”. Unpicking the complexity of what is there, and designing routes to more shared approaches requires time and investment, both of which are at a premium.

However, digitisation is not going away, and good services are now essential to citizens' quality of life, and the smooth functioning of businesses in Wales.

There are many challenges in the way of adopting the tried-and-tested best practice approaches. We need local government in Wales to take full advantage of the range of expertise and support available to develop shared approaches to modernisation.

Standards

In Wales we have developed the Digital Service Standard. This draws on global experience over years of how to create good public services. These are a 'gold standard'

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set of guidance that, if followed, will lead to the development of public services that are efficiently delivered, meet user needs, drive effective digital uptake and improve value for money.

The Digital Service Standard for Wales has been agreed by Welsh Government and endorsed by Wales's Chief Digital Officers (CDOs). However, it is not mandated, and there are no penalties or specific incentives available to drive organisations to use it. We are not seeing significant moves towards familiarisation with, or adoption of, the Standard in local government. This is likely to be the subject of a larger-scale push by CDPS in the coming year, with the support of Wales's sector CDOs and we need senior leaders in local government to engage with it.

A growing package of guidance and support is available from CDPS to work towards the Standard, with a Service Manual (how to guides), service reviews of public services, and guidance on the skills required to work towards the Standard.

Here are some practical examples of the work CDPS has done with local government in Wales.

Streamlining Welsh Benefits

The goal is “a person-centred, compassionate, and consistent” approach to the design and delivery of Welsh benefits, underpinned by the [Welsh Benefits Charter](#), so that people need only tell their story once to receive all the financial support to which they are entitled. But overall, progress feels slow. Though the Benefits Charter was signed by all 22 local authorities, with great support for the common vision, achieving pace in the delivery requires commitment and resources to create an agreed programme plan for a period of years. Creating this will require commitment to aligning the goals and priorities between all parties. It is essential to understand who needs to do what, by when, to make the vision real.

Co-designing benefit-related content

Preceding (but linked to) the Streamlining Welsh Benefits project, we worked with local authorities and Welsh Government to co-design better online content for two benefits: [School Essentials Grant](#) and [Free School Meals](#).

The aim was to make it easier for people to apply for this support, reduce duplication of effort in the 22 local authorities, and improve the way that we develop bilingual services. 5 out of 22 local authorities are using this content which has been tested with users. CDPS viewed this as an easily adoptable way to address the “let's not do this 22 different ways” appeal, but this low take-up suggests insufficient priority given to service improvement.

Improving the planning system in Wales

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We've partnered with Cardiff, Gwynedd and Vale of Glamorgan local authorities to [improve the pre-application planning process](#). Our research shows that this work could significantly reduce unnecessary customer contact and unnecessary applications – in an area which is essential to enable policy goals.

We have learned that to collaborate across local government, formal partnerships with a few early adopters and project partners is the best way to ensure clarity, agree ways of working and expected commitment from all parties.

But this work also illustrates the impediments to digital modernisation, as resources in local government are very thin on the ground. CDPS is often told that local government priorities do not align with central government priorities (such as improving planning services).

2. Long-term planning and development of digital across the local government sector;

CDPS has created a leadership group with sector Chief Digital Officers (CDO) for Wales (CDO for Local Government, CDO for Welsh Government and CDIO for Health and Social Care). Together, we agree the key opportunities and challenges in the digital space for Wales. We seek to lead together, with one voice on the common priorities, whether that is around meeting the Digital Service Standard or creating a common approach to the adoption of AI.

At times, different priorities, particularly between central and local government, have got in the way of alignment and collaboration. However, this group is the backbone of a shared digital agenda for Wales and has been the driver for the creation of two essential governance forums. The Standards Working Group is a pan-sector panel which oversees the adoption of agreed Standards in the Digital Data and Technology space in Wales, and the AI/Automation Steering Group, a pan-sector panel which has overseen the creation of common guidelines for the effective adoption of AI and Automation. While effective, however, these groups have seen lower levels of engagement from local government than is ideal, suggesting lack of resource and priority being given.

All CDOs and the CDPS CEOs observe the same difficulties in making change at any pace in the public sector; extremely stretched resources, low skills and capacity, a complex technology landscape and the lack of any controls on spending which might lead to better practice and more use of common technology to name a few. We also see leadership, mindset and standard approaches as requiring a big change.

Public Sector leaders in Wales are faced, as we know, by significant challenges. The demands for modernisation sit alongside many competing priorities. However, as previously stated, citizens and businesses increasingly organise their lives and work on digital channels.

As Wales's central and local government seek to deliver policy outcomes, better provision online is a huge factor in success. Badly delivered services impact citizens' lives and prevent them receiving the good outcomes designed in policies.

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We believe leaders in the public sector must commit to giving digital modernisation higher priority. This takes time, resource and, most importantly, commitment - and acknowledgement that without action, the people and businesses of Wales will not benefit from the advancements available.

Leadership starts at the top. CDPS has not seen sufficient prioritisation of modernisation, or of the expertise required to design and deliver it. The Local Government CDO post remains an interim post, with a small team at relatively junior levels. The siting of the digital team within WLGA has been the subject of on-going questions. The WLGA's Digital Board has gone for months without meeting, due to a change in Chair.

We are aware that only 4 local authorities have appointed CDOs, and that of these only 2 sit on their leadership boards. We are aware that one authority is seeking to recruit a CDO at a salary significantly less than any national benchmark.

These factors suggest senior leadership is at best uncertain of the amount of modernisation it wishes to see. They do not signal ambition, support and recognition of digital advancement in local government.

Clarity on Local Government goals for digital modernisation

It has consistently been hard to gain any common view of plans, goals and ambitions for digital modernisation across local government in Wales. This may not be surprising given the pressures on local government. It has often been easier to understand what is not wanted than what is wanted.

There is great commonality across services delivered in local government, but what is expressed by individual local authorities is that their models and approaches are very tailored. It is hard to challenge this without a higher-level, central review and analysis taking place that makes clear where the commonalities lie.

Who should take responsibility for such a review? The WLGA or the Local Government Digital team with the sponsorship of the WLGA, perhaps.

A review could show options for more common approaches, sharing of processes or technology, and shared assets to be developed.

At a simple level, we are aware of commonly required features or components of services being developed and built many times over by each service team. Many are so basic that a 'library' of such components could be shared across local government – in fact more widely across the devolved public sector. An example might be an address look-up feature, a basic element needed by every service, but currently every service will build its own, driving cost, and impeding efforts to streamline services.

Efforts to take more of a common view around delivery and building of common approaches could be valuable in reducing cost, speeding up delivery via use of common assets, and providing consistency of experience and familiarity for service users.

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Issues in alignment and clarity of remit

The Welsh Government has sought to accelerate modernisation in the public sector's use of digital technology and approaches, to deliver better services and build the digital economy. It created the CDO roles in central and local government and Health and Care, drew up a Digital Strategy for Wales and created CDPS.

These are excellent steps. However, particularly in the central-local government work around digital, CDPS has observed issues with differing ideas and priorities.

1. Central government seeking improvement in specific services run by local government which is necessary to meet government goals

This has led to the initiation of joint projects between central and local government and CDPS, but ongoing disagreement over prioritisation and resourcing of these. Local government states that it has insufficient resource to put into projects which have not been agreed as priorities for local authorities, though they are priorities for central government. CDPS has great difficulty trying to bridge this gap.

2. That central government can set goals for local government, but not tell local government how to achieve these

This makes creating joint goals and plans for improvement projects difficult, as Welsh Government is very cautious about defining improvements, and/or local government resents the implications that current delivery is not good enough.

Funding models do not enable effective digital projects

This is a longstanding issue for those of us seeking to deliver digital improvement projects which need a different profile of funding to traditional projects. A traditional project might require a high level of funding to achieve a one-off goal, perhaps the creation of a bricks-and-mortar asset for example.

Funding can then cease as business-as-usual processes take over. In the digital space, products need long-term continuous iteration to keep up with changing technologies and expectations. For example, we all see our banking apps continually updated. Therefore, digital projects require a different profile of funding: lower figures, possibly quite low in the stages where initial Minimum Viable Products are developed and go live. But over the lifetime of the product, which may be 10-15 years or even more, at a lower, but sustained level. This is at odds with the traditional annual or short-term funding cycles.

CDPS shares with the CDO for Local Government a view that the current Digital Transformation Fund model is not fit for purpose. This annual funding model leads to annual sets of proposals, which are agreed, but must be delivered largely by contractors as the funding model does not allow permanent recruitment. The large cost of expert contractors limits the scale of the project. These contractor teams take time to assemble; research periods take further time; practical work commences but there is little time left to

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build a product; the financial year ends, the contractors are let go, knowledge is not transferred, and the project is difficult if not impossible to sustain.

A fit-for-purpose model would look much more like a lower level of guaranteed funding which would allow the recruitment of a permanent digital “squad” which could develop, build and iterate meaningful and useful live products over a much longer period. Between 3 to 4 permanent members of expert staff can be employed for the price of an expert contractor.

3. The opportunities and challenges to moving the digital agenda forward within the sector;

Digital services, done well, make it easier for people to carry out tasks, reducing costs elsewhere. The [‘State of Digital Government’](#) review highlights some great examples of how poor digital design is costing organisations. For example, 60% of the calls to Defra’s call centres are from people who couldn’t carry out their task online, due to unclear content or broken links. If this analysis was carried out across local government services in Wales, how would they fare? How much valuable time and money is being wasted?

Culture and mindset

The intention to do things differently depends on leadership, mindset and attitudinal changes. Without changes in mindset, current and further investment will not deliver value for money in the digital space.

Given the budget pressures and expectations of local government, mindset change is hard. But it’s essential to learn from what has been demonstrated across the world as better ways to deliver digital services. This aligns with Audit Wales ‘Digital by Design’ report, which recommends that councils take a more systemic approach to learning, so they can adapt and improve their work on digital.

Some parts of local government are adopting more forward-thinking mindset and attitudinal approaches, leading to very positive practices such as end-to-end service mapping and design and user-centred development and product testing on users during development.

However, not everyone is giving these mindset changes the attention they need. It’s important to stress that the technological aspects of modernising services are often the ‘easy’ part. Business change, a learning mindset and an understanding that digital provision requires different delivery approaches are harder, but just as essential.

Leaders in local government in Wales need to take this challenge seriously. The mountain of evidence for investing in digital is growing – we need the WLGA and local government to take it seriously: recruit people with the right skills and empower and champion them to do their job.

Procurement

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Local authorities have huge, combined buying power, but this power is not used, due to a lack of a cohesive digital sourcing strategy, organisational silos, the challenges of sharing services, and the lack of collective buying drive fragmented purchasing.

Some of the most significant savings in government are possible through adopting shared procurement approaches. We have a few examples in Wales of where this has worked well including the Hwb Learning Platform and associated infrastructure and device catalogues used by local authorities for school technology.

4. To better understand how local authorities collaborate and share knowledge and experiences on developing digital, and to look at mechanisms to scale up and share good practice and innovation.

The Digital Advisory Group (DAG), made up of a group of passionate digital leaders in Local Government is a great vehicle to ensure digital is thought of as an enabler. CDPS has a seat at the DAG table to share learning, experience and advice. It is unclear to CDPS, however, how consistently the DAG members have the ear of their CEOs and their leadership team.

Some examples of good joint digital leadership: the transformation plan for Caerphilly Council is a totally joined-up collaboration between the digital team and the Council executive, with the intention of addressing both the need to deliver better services and the need to make cost savings.

We're aware that at Neath Port Talbot Council, the executive and the digital team have strong common goals around digital delivery and the resources this takes. It is clearly understood that the CDO and the Director of Services must work hand-in-glove to deliver for residents and the business.

Communities of Practice

Communities of Practice are voluntary groups of practitioners or other staff with an interest in specific areas. CDPS have developed 6 in the digital space including user research, AI, content design and service design.

CDPS would like to see the number of local government staff grow through senior endorsement, as these communities are powerful drivers of potential collaborations, scaling good practice and innovation, sharing knowledge and, critically, growing confidence as staff realise, they are part of a larger national intent.

We look forward to discussing this further with you on February 12.

Harriet Green and Myra Hunt,
Joint CEOs, Centre for Digital Public Services.



Date issued: 29 January 2025

Local Government and Housing Committee Inquiry into Digital Local Government

- 1 The Auditor General for Wales welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Senedd Local Government and Housing Committee's Inquiry into Digital Local Government. The evidence below summarises recent relevant work undertaken by Audit Wales in relation to digital in local government.

Summary of recent relevant audit work in relation to digital local government

Thematic review of councils' strategic approach to digital

- 2 In 2023 we began a thematic review of principal councils' strategic approaches to digital. This work concluded with a national summary report [Digital by design?](#), published in August 2024. We also published 22 local reports setting out our view on each councils' arrangements. Links to each of these reports are contained in the appendix of the national summary report above. The local reports are also published on the [Audit Wales website](#).
- 3 This review was not an evaluation of the progress or effectiveness of councils' approaches to digital per se. In accordance with the AGW's statutory duties, it considered the extent to which these approaches demonstrated proper arrangements for securing value for money in the use of resources, and application of the sustainable development principle. The overall question we sought to answer in each Council through this review was:

'In developing its digital strategy has the Council acted in accordance with the sustainable development principle and put in place proper arrangements to secure value for money in the use of its resources?'
- 4 The overall finding from this work was:

'while many councils recognise the role digital can play in delivering their longer-term ambitions, weaknesses in their arrangements pose value for money risks.'
- 5 In forming this conclusion, we also arrived at the following findings:
 - councils were, to varying extents, thinking about how they could use digital to deliver better outcomes and achieve their strategic ambitions over the long term;
 - however, we identified consistent weaknesses in resourcing and monitoring that pose value for money risks;

- fundamentally, councils did not appear to have an explicit focus on value for money or the sustainable development principle in developing their digital strategies.
- 6 We also set out five key lessons relating to evidence, collaboration, resourcing, impact and learning from this work. These are summarised below and set out in more detail in my national summary report:
- councils could draw on a broader evidence base to inform a long term, citizen-centred approach to digital;
 - councils could go further in working across internal boundaries and with external partners to deliver maximum value from their digital strategies;
 - councils could do more to identify the benefits that could be achieved and the resources required to help them turn ambition into reality;
 - councils need to make sure they can assess the impact of their digital strategies and individual projects;
 - councils could take a more systematic approach to learning, so they can adapt and improve their work on digital.

Financial sustainability of local government

- 7 The findings from our work in relation to councils' strategic approaches to digital can be viewed too in the context of our recent work and report on the [Financial sustainability of local government](#) (December 2024). In this report we noted that: 'Some councils are better placed than others to weather the financial challenges ahead. But given the scale of the funding gaps projected for local government in the coming years, all councils will need to keep up or increase the pace of change if they are to meet the urgency and scale of the challenge. The Welsh Government will also need to support the sector in meeting this challenge.'
- 8 Digital transformation forms a significant part of the changes that councils are making to respond to the financial pressures facing the sector.

Cyber security/cyber resilience

- 9 In 2020 we carried out a national study looking at cyber resilience in the Welsh public sector, which included surveying more than 70 Welsh organisations about their approaches to cyber resilience, including local government bodies. We held a webinar to share our emerging findings from our national study, items of good practice and discussed the future of cyber resilience in Wales. Based on advice from experts in the field of cyber security, we shared our findings privately with public bodies rather than making them publicly available, we explained the reasons for this on our website - [Our report on Cyber Resilience and why we're not](#)

publishing it. We also published a blog one year later that reflected on certain developments following our report - Cyber resilience – one year on.

- 10 In October 2022, we privately circulated to public bodies a follow up report called Learning from cyber-attacks. That report concluded that cyber-attacks remain a significant risk to all organisations. And it urged public bodies in Wales to learn from recent cyber incidents and prioritise an organisation-wide approach to cyber resilience.
- 11 We have also undertaken audit work on cyber security in a number of individual councils. Generally, we have chosen not to publish the findings of this work for the same reasons referred to in paragraph 9. But we have shared our findings from this work with the relevant individual councils.

Digital inclusion in Wales

- 12 Whilst not specific to the local government section, we published a report on Digital inclusion in Wales in March 2023. The report highlights a number of issues including:
 - 7% of adults in Wales are ‘digitally excluded’, meaning they have not personally used the internet in the previous three months.
 - the percentage of households with access to the internet has steadily increased since 2012 but some groups in society are more likely to be excluded.
 - while there is enough data to suggest high-level trends, there are data gaps that make it difficult to give a complete picture and gain an understanding of the ‘lived experience’ of people who are excluded.
 - digital inclusion is complex and is not simply an issue of access to technology. It is not just an issue of rurality or just an issue for older people. Even when people have access and digital skills, some people may still prefer to access services face-to-face.
 - there is a trend of public bodies moving some of their services online, which has many potential benefits but also risks disadvantaging digitally excluded people.
 - while the UK Government is responsible for digital infrastructure across the UK, the Welsh Government is investing in broadband infrastructure.
 - the Welsh Government has a specific mission around digital inclusion and is investing in digital inclusion projects. The report included reference to the

Digital Communities for Wales programme delivered by Cwmpas and support for the Centre for Digital Public Services.¹

From Firefighting to Future-proofing – the Challenge for Welsh Public Services

- 13 In From firefighting to future-proofing – the challenge for Welsh public services we highlighted, among other things, issues relating to the use of digital technology across public services. These are summarised below:
- technology to transform service delivery, reduce costs and improve the user experience often requires replacement of antiquated IT systems, improvement in the quality and shareability of data, and recruitment and retention of scarce skills in high demand;
 - concern about the overall pace of progress in harnessing digital technology to improve public services;
 - financial pressures facing public services present challenges for digital investment, even though such solutions should result in more efficient or effective services;
 - alongside contractual difficulties and delays with some ICT projects, we are not always seeing clear evidence that significant investment in new systems is reaping the intended rewards;
 - reliance on digital systems leads to increased risks including cyber-security.
 - spending on infrastructure and systems needs to be balanced with work to tackle digital exclusion.

¹ Since our digital inclusion report, the Welsh Government has decided to designate the Centre for Digital Public Services under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. Therefore, the Auditor General now has a duty to examine, periodically, the extent to which it has applied the sustainable development principle when setting well-being objectives and taking steps to meet them.

Papur 3 / Paper 3

Agenda Item 4

Cwmpas is a development agency working for positive change in Wales. We are a co-operative, and our focus is on building a fairer, greener economy and a more equal society, where people and planet come first.

Cwmpas are digital leaders. We are passionate about digital transformation and using tech for social good. We support organisations and the third sector to evaluate, improve and implement digital change and to future proof their service delivery. We understand the digital inclusion agenda, the Welsh context, and the communities we work with. We have experience working with all health boards, all local authorities, Digital Health and Care Wales, Social Care Wales, County Voluntary Councils, large national 3rd sector organisations, local 3rd sector organisations and community groups, as well as direct delivery with citizens.

Current use of digital to design and improve public service provision around the needs of users (TOR1)

Evidence

Cwmpas endeavours to adopt the Digital Service Standard for Wales ([Digital Service Standard for Wales | Centre for Digital Public Services](#)). Our Business Growth and Consultancy (BGC) Team utilises a user centred service design approach to digital projects and services. The BGC team works in collaboration across the organisation and encourages the use of user centred design, and some colleagues have undertaken user centred design training in the organisation.

Delivery

We have adopted user centred design in the delivery of two current programmes:

NEWID - [Newid Cymru](#)

Newid is a Welsh Government funded programme designed to promote good digital practice across the third sector in Wales. This is achieved by providing training, support and information. The project has three partners, WCVA, Promo Cymru and Cwmpas. In this project, we have adopted a service design approach and we are delivering design digital services for the third sector. Fifty percent of the organisations we are supporting help local authorities with outreach, and health and social care delivery. This programme is supported by CDPS.

Ofcom – Media Literacy.

This is a three-year programme funded by Ofcom to provide Media Literacy delivery in Rhondda Cynon Taf. We have adopted a user centred design approach for programme and content design, and workshop delivery. We are also conducting user research within communities in Rhondda Cynon Taf over a period of 4 months to support the delivery and research of the programme. One member of the delivery team is also a board member of CDPS. Both Marc Davies and Samina Ali have completed service or user design courses to support them to deliver this programme.

Long-term planning and development of digital across the local government sector (TOR2)

Cwmpas has worked with a number of local authorities providing advice and interventions around Digital Transformation.

Evidence

- Cwmpas has worked with Powys Council to conduct a Digital Maturity Assessment, and supported them to develop their digital strategy and digital adoption across the organisation. This work was carried out 2022.
- In partnership with Owen Davies Consultancy, Cwmpas has completed research work around Internet Of Things (IoT) for Powys Council, which was looking at introducing footfall sensors in several towns of Powys to help with events and planning.
- We have had conversations with several councils around the adoption of technology, and "once for Wales" working with WLGA and CDPS.
- Cwmpas has also been responsible for delivering direct digital inclusion intervention in communities as a part of Shared Prosperity Funding with Digital Confidence Denbighshire and Digital Confidence Powys.

Cwmpas is the primary deliverer of support in the social economy in Wales. We have supported the development of social enterprises, co-operatives and employee-owned businesses since our creation over forty years ago. Through our existing programmes we support large sections of the third sector to develop and grow and this can include consideration of the use of digital for marketing, logistics and data handling. As we have 'on the ground' knowledge of the needs of a large section of social businesses who often deliver key services for public sector organisations we do feel that we could offer more to support bodies such as WLGA and CDPS in their long-term planning and development of digital across the local government sector.

The opportunities and challenges to moving the digital agenda forward within the sector(TOR3)

Challenges:

Each local authority faces its own challenges. We have been in a fortunate position where we have been able to observe and discuss a number of challenges across Welsh local authorities:

- There is often a lack of understanding around User Centred Design and how it can help save money, create efficient services and put the citizen (user) at the heart of those services. Good user design will recognise that it will still be necessary for some citizens to access services without using digital.

- Lack of skills: many councils do not have a clear understanding of Digital Design and Technology (DDAT) and how that can improve service delivery.
- IT is outsourced for a number of Local Authorities.
- Staff Retention - some councils are losing digital staff to health and civil service, as they cannot be competitive in their pay scales.
- Budgets- Many local authorities don't have the budget to upskill and train staff in digital. Succession Planning and Talent Pool Management is low on the agenda for many councils.
- Some local authorities are more advanced in Digital than others, some councils have migrated to the cloud, and are really advanced in adoption of digital technology and tools, and some are still operating with on-premise software solutions.
- Due to lack of clarity of services, local authorities often do not know which organisation to turn to for digital support, is it WLGA, or CDPS, or Soctim. As a result many are paying tech-based consultancies for support.
- Both WLGA and CDPS lack the full resources they need to provide full Digital Transformation services.

Digital inclusion

Without appropriate investment in digital inclusion, the business case for digital transformation does not add up. The level of digital exclusion in Wales is higher than in the rest of the UK, with as many as 7% of the population, or 170,000 people, not using the internet. The portion of the public who remain digitally-excluded include some of the people most likely to be socially-isolated, reliant on public services and users of health and social care services. They risk being left behind in the digital health revolution.

It is essential that digital inclusion is at the heart of digital transformation. Ensuring that everyone can confidently access digital public services and participate in digital society is central to successfully achieving the ambitions of the Well-being of Future Generations Act.

In addition, it is essential that digital inclusion is at the heart of investment in digital transformation for there to be a coherent business case. Digital transformation must be more than finding cheaper ways to deliver services, but about creating a service with the end-user in mind. If investment in digital transformation makes accessing services more difficult for those who need it most, it will exacerbate inequality and inefficiencies. If we do not bring everyone along with us on the journey to more efficient and effective public services, we will need to duplicate services or people will fall through the gaps – leading to poorer well-being and more costs in the long-term.

It is clear that digitally-transformed public services are essential, and that we maximise the social value that can be created by embedding digital services in local government – but ensuring this is done in a user-led way is key.

Last year, we brought together nearly 100 key stakeholders to a conference in Cardiff, launching our Digital Inclusion: Vision for the Future report. Following years of working on digital inclusion in Wales, we presented five specific recommendations for policymakers:

- There should be a national digital inclusion programme that:
 - Delivers direct, targeted support to the 7% of people who are still digitally excluded, and those who do not have the five essential digital skills.
 - Provides the support, collaboration, and amplification to organisations and community groups to establish a mainstreamed digital skills and inclusion agenda, that is the responsibility of everyone in Wales.
- Implement the findings of the Minimum Digital Living Standard research pilot and expand to all households in Wales
- Funding of the Digital Inclusion Alliance Wales must be continued to ensure its sustainability and enable it to consider options for a transition to alternative funding sources, should that be required in future.
- Public sector should develop strategic partnerships with the technology industry to support an expanded digital Inclusion programme.
- All digital transformation programmes in the future should include a percentage of their funding for digital inclusion.

Opportunities

- A review and update of the Welsh Government Digital Strategy. If we are to work in a user centred way then the strategy needs to be agile and put the user at the heart of its delivery. This would also create an opportunity to bring in Media Literacy, under the Digital Skills function in line with the Online Safety Act 2023.
- Third Sector to work more closely with CDPS, and WLGA. At the moment we work in collaboration when required, but we believe that there is a need for a CDO for Third Sector, to enable the sector to have a seat at the table, and to bridge the gap in digital between third sector and Local Government.
- A dedicated budget for digital for Local Authorities assessed by a business case.
- User Centred Design (UCD) training to be subsidised to enable digital skills enhancement. There should be a UCD specialist in every organisation.
- A shift and support for more projects to be managed and delivered in an agile way.
- Innovate & look at emerging technology, especially Artificial Intelligence.
- Wales has developed high-quality [Digital Service Standards](#) – we now have the opportunity to promote adoption and implementation, holdi organisations to account and measure outcomes.

To better understand how local authorities collaborate and share knowledge and experiences on developing digital, and to look at mechanisms to scale up and share good practice and innovation (TOR4)

There are some brilliant “Communities of Practice” set up, and we also have a “Service Design Cymru” Community set up for sharing best practice.

Lots of people from both Local Government, Civil Service, and Third Sector access and use these communities of practice.

The challenge is every council is different is size and needs, around digital technology and digital adoption as already expressed in the questions above.

A central "Knowledge Hub" with toolkits would be most helpful in the follow areas:

- UCD- UX, Customer Journey Mapping, etc.
- SAAS solutions
- Procurement frameworks and procurement support of Digital Solutions
- Directory of SAAS suppliers that provide the solution in Welsh to comply with the Language Standards.
- How to scope the need for new Digital Technology
- How to write a business case
- APM – methodology- real life council examples.
- Emerging Technology & Innovation.

In relation to digital inclusion, the [Digital Inclusion Alliance Wales](#) has been recognised by members as being a key asset in ensuring a space for peer-networking, data gathering and experience-sharing, fostering meaningful change across sectors. It is growing to be an influential hub to support organisations, small and large delivering digital inclusion systematically across the country and we would want to see more organisations joining the network in the next phase. We have representatives of local government in the Alliance and would welcome more to join and benefit from having a dedicated space to learn from others and discuss digital inclusion.



Senedd Evidence from the Chief Digital Officer

January 2025

Local Government and Housing Committee, Senedd Cymru Inquiry into Digital in Local Government

Lindsey Phillips, CDO for Local Government

Overview

1. This evidence paper addresses the inquiry terms of reference from the Local Government and Housing Committee as communicated by email on 02 December 2024.
2. The Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) is submitting written and oral evidence separately on behalf of councils in Wales. This evidence therefore focuses on the work and remit of the Chief Digital Officer (CDO) and team as it relates to the Terms of Reference, and the views of the CDO in respect of the questions posed.

Background

3. The Chief Digital Officer for Local Government in Wales was originally appointed by the WLGA in the Spring of 2021, at the same time as the publication of the Digital Strategy for Wales by Welsh Government. The strategy specifically references the CDO for Local Government as playing a key part in the leadership and delivery of the strategy, alongside the CDOs for Welsh Government, Health and Social Care, and the Centre for Digital Public Services (CDPS).
4. A Digital Team was appointed within the WLGA to support the CDO in delivering the activities required to support councils. Following some initial turnover in the CDO post (a common issue in this field), arrangements are now in place, and the team is well established.
5. The WLGA digital team works to:
 - a. Foster collaborative digital transformation and innovation across councils in Wales.
 - b. Help councils bring together digital tools, technology, and skills, to deliver services that meet their customer expectations.
 - c. Help councils work together to achieve better outcomes for their customers.
 - d. Work with other policy areas in the WLGA to support the use of digital in their service areas.
6. The CDO has a key role in strategically leading the digital team, but also in:
 - a. Driving digital transformation in councils.



- b. Advocating for digital in and for local government.
 - c. Raising the profile of digital leadership at senior levels in councils, advocating for a recognition of the importance of digital.
 - d. Brokering partnerships across the public, private and third sectors, both in Wales and beyond.
 - e. Identifying and leveraging digital funding, resources and services for councils and projects.
 - f. Supporting the delivery of the Digital Strategy for Wales, working with the CDO / CEO network, and advising Ministers on digital policy and priorities.
7. The CDO role and the core digital team are funded via ringfenced Revenue Support Grant. Since 2023, the digital team has also administered the Digital Transformation Fund of approximately £1.3m on behalf of Welsh Government, providing grant funding directly to projects which support the digital agenda in local government. These projects are often supplemented by resources from local government or other organisations.
 8. In early 2023, the CDO (then Head of Digital) met with the digital lead / team from each council in Wales to develop an understanding of their digital maturity across areas such as strategy, structure, people, leadership, collaboration, and technology. The exercise also gathered feedback on the experience of the CDO and team to date, and the expectations going forward. This was vital in shaping the strategic direction of the team and ensuring alignment with local government needs and expectations.
 9. One of the most striking outcomes of these visits was the breadth of the descriptions of the scope of digital in local government amongst those responsible for digital in their own authorities. 'What does digital mean for your local authority?' produced 22 different definitions across a broad spectrum, and whilst not surprising, it does reflect the different stages of the digital transformation journey that councils are at.
 10. The CDO and team consider digital to have a broad meaning for local government, where digital tools, technologies and skills are used to improve services; improve internal processes; and improve public trust and engagement (see [Appendix 1](#) for further details). Addressing this vast agenda across twenty-two complex organisations with a team of 9 is quite a challenge.



Committee Terms of Reference

Current use of digital to design and improve public service provision around the needs of users

11. The rapid acceleration of technology in our society has led to significantly increased customer expectations in respect of digital public services in recent years. This includes increased expectations around availability, accessibility, efficiency, security and privacy, mobile compatibility and integration, and personalisation.
12. User-centred design (UCD) is a design philosophy and process that prioritizes the needs, preferences, and limitations of end-users at every stage of the design and development process. The goal is to create products or services that are highly usable and provide a positive user experience.
13. Some key principles of user-centred design include:
 - a. User Involvement: Involving users throughout the design process to gather feedback and insights.
 - b. Iterative Design: Continuously refining and improving the design based on user feedback and testing.
 - c. Usability: Ensuring the product or service is easy to use and meets the needs of the users.
 - d. Accessibility: Making the product or service accessible to as many people as possible, including those with disabilities.
 - e. Context of Use: Understanding the environment and conditions in which the product or service will be used.
14. UCD is most effective when there is:
 - a. Early and ongoing user involvement
 - b. Cross-functional collaboration and multi-disciplinary teams
 - c. An iterative process where designs are continuously tested and refined based on user feedback
 - d. A deep understanding of and empathy with users' contexts
 - e. Regular usability testing
 - f. A design that is accessible to all users
 - g. Flexibility and openness to change and adapt designs
15. The Digital Service Standard for Wales, developed by the Centre for Digital Public Services (CDPS), defines what good public services look like and helps organisations design and deliver efficient, cost effective and user-centred digital services. The standard consists of 12 points across 3 categories and organisations should aim to meet the whole standard. The standard is very much based around many of the UCD requirements outlined in points 14 and 15 above. The standard is not mandatory in Wales. GDS, the UK Government Digital Service, has also developed a similar digital service standard.
16. The hierarchical structures, rigid project management approaches, fixed project budgets and webs of complex services and processes typically found in many councils, and that have evolved over many years do not lend



themselves well to this kind of approach and retrofitting it into organisations that traditionally have designed services based on the needs of the organisation is extremely challenging. Changing structures and practices to enable councils to work in an agile, flexible, and publicly engaged manner, particularly in a period of financial pressure, requires significant time, effort and resources.

17. Furthermore, many of the services councils' offer are statutory and can only be delivered by the individual councils that deliver them. They must be used by the public, and there is no alternative provider. Their quality is therefore more difficult to define as it's not possible to measure demand, price or profit in the same way as can be done with commercial or competitive services. Equally, the commercial drivers for improvement of services don't exist, as the public cannot choose to go elsewhere for the vast majority of council services. Often when budgets come under extreme pressure, the focus turns to service efficiency and cost saving rather than service improvement. Though there is an argument that the latter should result in the former, upfront resource and investment is required to carry out user-centred design, and the results can take some time to materialise.
18. Although most councils recognise to varying extent the potential value of UCD – there are pockets of extremely good practice, dedicated officers, and great results – there is more work to be done to prioritise and embed systemic user centred design in local government. Those pockets of good practice are also most successful where the value of UCD is recognised and understood at senior leadership level. Furthermore, some authorities rely on individual service level engagement and support to take forward UCD, and the function is therefore not an organisation-wide commitment. There is an opportunity for increased engagement with CDPS in this field of work. Local authorities are eager for more clarity on the purpose of CDPS and how to benefit directly from their services and support with respect to UCD. They would also wish to see priorities in this area aligned more closely with the sector's needs, rather than driven by Welsh Government mandates.
19. From a digital service standards point of view, there is not widespread adoption of either the GDS or the CDPS standards in councils in Wales. Whilst these continue to be voluntary, a significantly more focussed effort needs to be invested in raising awareness of the standards, stressing their importance, and facilitating the embedding of these standards in local government practice.
20. The CDO and team have delivered a range of service design projects in collaboration with councils over recent years. Examples of current projects include:
 - a. **Process Mapping** – following a request from the WLGA's Digital Advisory Group (DAG) and its Sustainable Futures sub-group, we are working with the CDO in the Digital Office for Scottish Local Government and CDPS on a joint project looking at collaboration and knowledge sharing in process mapping. The project includes Engage Process as a private sector partner. The project aims to improve



- processes, enhance operational efficiencies, deliver cost savings, and ultimately improve outcomes for citizens.
- b. **Digital Services Testing Kit** – in a local government collaboration, we developed a digital services testing toolkit providing a comprehensive resource designed to empower councils with the tools and guidance needed to conduct effective usability testing on their digital service. Following feedback that recruiting users was challenging, we supported the establishment of an incentive scheme to help councils recruit. Despite the project being identified, designed, and developed by and with councils, the take up overall has been low, and evaluation has confirmed several of the challenges outlined in earlier parts of this section.
 - c. **Content Design Community of Practice (CoP)** – We run an active local government Content Design CoP, established in 2022, with representatives from 12 councils regularly participating. The group brings together local authority individuals and provides a facilitated space to discuss and work together on embedding and championing good content design practices in Welsh local government. The aim of the group is to improve service delivery and deliver better outcomes for citizens, authority employees and other stakeholders.
 - d. **Accessibility** – The Accessibility Regulations for the Public Sector make accessibility a corporate responsibility for councils. As an outcome of the Content Design Community of Practice above, the digital team has supported 7 councils to set up a separate accessibility group to address the challenges of providing accessible documents online. The group meets bi-monthly to share knowledge and best practice and identify areas requiring support. The WLGA has funded some pilot accessibility training, and the group is now looking to develop accessibility guidelines; develop an awareness raising campaign; explore the establishment of accessibility champions in councils; and provide e-learning modules on accessibility.

Long-term planning and development of digital across the local government sector

21. The Digital Strategy for Wales was published by Welsh Government in March 2021, and, although it had no delivery time frame attached to it, it hasn't been updated since its original publication. Furthermore, the 'action plan' for delivery of the strategy, also published in March 2021 and not updated since, has no timescales associated with it, no clear responsibilities or accountability, and no tangible metrics for measurement.
22. The strategy states: *'We have identified six missions in this strategy and will continue to engage across sectors and stakeholder groups to make sure we get our priorities right and respond to changes during the strategy's lifetime.'*



There is no evidence that this engagement has happened, or that any review of the strategy has taken place in almost 4 years. Given the rapidly evolving nature of digital, a review of the strategy, and the development of a meaningful, timebound and measurable national action plan would provide a clear foundation for digital planning at a local government level. If Wales is to realise genuine digital transformation of its public services, a clear vision, bold action, supportive policy and appropriate funding allocation, will be needed at a national level.

23. During the Covid pandemic, the digital strategies of up to half of councils in Wales expired. However, councils have worked hard since this time to refresh or revise their strategies, and 95% of councils in Wales now have a current digital strategy. Of the remaining one, it is due to be published imminently. Most of these strategies cover a 3-to-5-year period, which reflects the balance needed to respond to rapidly changing technology while focusing on longer-term outcomes.
24. Budget constraints (short term budgets / cyclical grants / reduced funding / lack of revenue funding), capacity (outside of business as usual) and capability (in emerging tech such as artificial intelligence) also significantly restrict the ability to carry out long term planning of digital projects.
25. The CDO and team have delivered or are delivering various projects and research activities to support planning for digital with councils, examples include:
 - a. **Strategy Support** – the CDO and team have supported several councils in the development of their digital strategies.
 - b. **Chief Executive Engagement** – during the winter of 23/24, the CDO met individually with each of the 22 council Chief Executives in Wales to discuss their position on digital, explore their challenges, and understand their expectations around the role of the CDO and team. This has contributed significantly to shaping the work and activities of the CDO and team.
 - c. **Senior Leadership Digital Sessions** – The CDO has delivered several sessions to senior leadership teams in councils on the role of digital in local government, and an exploration of their own approach to digital transformation. This is an open rolling invitation for councils and sessions are currently being planned for 2025.
 - d. **Digital Self Evaluation** – The digital team worked with 8 councils during 2023 and 2024 to carry out facilitated digital self-evaluations with a broad range of participants at all levels of the organisation. These exercises allowed councils to carry out a facilitated thematic self-assessment of a range of areas including their ways of working, adoption of digital tools and techniques, leadership and governance.
 - e. **Social Care Programme** – In December 2023, the CDO for Health and Social Care, and the CDO for Local Government, made a joint commitment to develop a three-year delivery plan for digital in social care for 25-28, in line with the delivery of the Welsh Government's 'A Healthier Wales'. Over the course of 2024, a significant amount of



work has been done in developing this plan including landscape mapping of current projects, research, identifying strategic drivers and priorities; funding mapping; several workshops to explore the key challenges with a broad range of stakeholders; and the development of a number of project ideas for inclusion in the plan. A Digital in Social Care 'Engine Room' has been established, with representation from the key stakeholders (Welsh Government, Local Government, Social Care Wales, ADSS Cymru, WLGA, DHCW, CIW, National Office for Care and Support, Social Care and Digital practitioners from LG). The plan intends to bring forward some significant projects to address service reform or significant gaps but also to set up appropriate governance and support arrangements for identifying, evaluating, sharing and scaling existing and upcoming local, regional and national projects for digital in social care.

- f. **Connecting Wales Project Evaluation** – Connecting Wales / Cysylltu Cymru was set up in 2019 with Welsh Government support and established a procurement framework providing councils with access to cloud communications functionality at a fixed commercial rate. The WLGA Digital Team has agreed to undertake an evaluation of how well the Connecting Wales project has met the objectives set out in the original Connecting Wales / Cysylltu Cymru business case and complete an appraisal of options available to the Connecting Wales / Cysylltu Cymru Board to achieve these aims and objectives in the future. This will support the Connecting Wales Board to plan the future provision of this collaborative procurement programme for councils.
- g. **Digital Procurement Research** – the WLGA Digital Team is carrying out a piece of research to improve collaboration, share resources, and enhance support of the preparatory and delivery work for the change in procurement regulations in February 2025. The work was identified by the Digital Advisory Group's (DAG) members and recommended as an action by the Sustainable Futures (DAG sub-group) to carry out an initial baselining exercise. The group has worked in collaboration with the WLGA's Procurement Network to develop the research scope. The project intends to ensure digital procurement in local authorities is aligned and informed by the wider network of procurement experts. By coordinating the analysis of digital procurement activity with relevant policy leads and stakeholder groups strategic improvements can be identified. This will enable collaborative digital procurement planning to be realised amongst council in Wales.
- h. **Cyber Assessment Framework (CAF)** – in partnership with Welsh Government, the CDO and team is supporting the rollout of the CAF to all local authorities in Wales. The CAF provides a consistent and repeatable self-assessment framework for public organisations to follow to reduce inconsistent levels of cyber resilience across Wales's public services. The project seeks to enable Welsh councils to embed a long-term approach to self-assessing the level of cyber resilience



within their organisation. The implementation is happening collaboratively across all 22 councils, providing a 'once for Wales' approach, with a heavy emphasis on knowledge sharing to ensure lessons learned from all participants can contribute to strengthening cyber resilience in Welsh local authorities.



The opportunities and challenges to moving the digital agenda forward within the sector

26. The main opportunities and challenges to digital transformation as identified by individual councils are outlined in the WLGAs evidence document. This section therefore focuses more broadly on some of the national and systemic challenges and opportunities observed by the CDO in working with the 22 local authorities over recent years.
27. Many of the challenges outlined below are echoed in the recently published report from the UK Department for Science, Innovation and Technology: *A review of technology and data in the public sector: successes, challenges and root causes January 2025* (see [State of digital government review – January 2025](#)) which notes the significant potential of digital but states ‘...our approaches to leadership, structure, measurement, talent and funding do not yet do justice to this potential: it is time to transform and reform the way we do digital’.

Challenges

Local Authority Structures and Operation	<p>Councils are large and complex organisations, which makes it difficult to take advantage of digital in an agile and flexible manner.</p> <p>The ever-changing political landscape and the current environment of increasing demand and tightening budgets places significant pressure on teams to realise short term improvements and budget savings.</p> <p>Delivering hundreds of disparate services can also make prioritisation, and particularly collaborative prioritisation, challenging.</p> <p>Further support is needed for senior management teams to drive the significant changes needed to realise digital transformation across the organisations.</p>
Digital Maturity and Foundations	<p>There is disparity between councils in respect of their digital maturity. Many councils lack elements of the digital foundations upon which genuine transformation can be built. These include foundational digital broadband and mobile infrastructure, digital leadership, data management practices, digital skills and modern IT systems. Although investment in these foundations doesn't offer the political headlines of technologies such as AI, without support to ensure these foundations are sound, digital transformation will be beyond reach.</p>
Sector Skills and Capacity	<p>There is a significant gap between the skills employers need and those available in the workforce for many digital skills. Many businesses report difficulties in finding candidates with the necessary technical skills. This is</p>



	<p>exacerbated by the fast pace of technological advancements which means that skills can quickly become outdated. For councils, who struggle to compete with salaries in the private sector, and even with other parts of the public sector, securing these scarce skills is often beyond their means. As a consequence, local government has a lower proportion of digital and data professionals in their workforce, lower even than other areas of the public sector such as health.</p>
Tech Challenges and Legislative Landscape	<p>The complex and rapidly evolving tech and legislative landscape (e.g. AI and GDPR) can make it difficult to have clarity on what to do in what order (especially for less mature councils) and can limit councils' ability to quickly take advantage of new opportunities. Skills and capacity challenges also lead to a higher reliance on outsourcing in an often concentrated supply chain.</p> <p>A small number of suppliers for common systems, councils struggling to develop meaningful private sector partnerships and a lack of national collaborations also present challenges in securing high performance and value for money from digital systems.</p>
Collaboration Cost	<p>Whilst there is clear recognition of the potential benefits of collaboration, the cost of coordinating these efforts, both in terms of time and resources, can be high. Council staff often lack the time, space, and resources to effectively collaborate and innovate together. Funding needs to be made available to fund the collaboration overhead.</p>
Digital Definition and Standards	<p>The lack of adoption of digital standards in local authorities and the lack of a clear view of what good looks like / best practice for the sector can lead to inconsistent implementation and approaches, and difficulties in comparing and measuring success. There are no consistent metrics of digital performance.</p>
Over Saturation of Digital Groups and Forums	<p>A very light-touch review of groups, networks, and forums in which councils are participating in respect of digital to a greater or lesser extent, identified over 50 groups. This often leads to dilution of effectiveness and significant duplication. With a relatively small cohort of local authority staff working in digital across Wales, it is often the same individuals who are expected to attend the whole breadth of groups.</p>
Funding Challenges	<p>Funding for digital in Wales is fragmented and insufficient to realise significant digital transformation. There is also significant inequity in certain cross sector areas, for example Digital Health Care Wales (DHCW) has 1500 staff</p>



	<p>and an annual budget of approximately £190m to develop digital solutions for health but there is little funding to support digital solutions for social care.</p> <p>There are also significant inconsistencies in the levels of funding of digital teams at a local level.</p> <p>Funding models have not adapted to new digital norms which are now revenue intensive and based often on subscription services such as Software as a Service (SaaS) and cloud computing rather than more traditional upfront capital investment.</p>
Increased Cyber Threats	<p>Increased digitisation of services and the value of data held by councils make them an attractive target for cyber criminals. Legacy IT systems also present challenges in protection against modern cyber threats. Budget constraints and lack of resources can limit councils' ability to invest in robust cybersecurity measures, and in the face of a significant increase in the number of cyber-attacks on all types of organisations, this is an increasing challenge for councils. These factors combined make it crucial for councils to continuously update their cybersecurity strategies, invest in training and technology, and work collaboratively, to protect against evolving threats.</p>
Risk Appetite and Other Drivers	<p>The risk appetite of councils varies across the sector, which often drives different behaviours from council to council. Local political and organisational drivers in individual councils can also be misaligned with longer term strategic plans and national workstreams designed to address the needs of the wider sector.</p> <p>These variations present challenges in identifying common priorities and areas where collaboration can be successful, this is particularly challenging when trying to develop projects across all 22 councils.</p>



Opportunities

National Strategy, Vision, and Responsibility	<p>A bold and current national digital strategy would support local government with strategic direction to effectively implement impactful digital transformation that genuinely reforms service provision and internal operations.</p> <p>A refresh of the national strategy and the development of a time-bound, measurable and achievable action plan for the national digital strategy for Wales would assist in setting the long term aims and objectives for the public sector and allow councils to buy in to a collective direction and collaborative actions for delivery.</p> <p>Furthermore, clarity around the roles of CDPS, Welsh Government, and the CDO and Digital Local Government team in driving forward digital in local government, around a shared vision, would significantly support delivery of, and accountability for, the strategy.</p>
Social Care Programme	<p>The three-year social care programme being developed by the Health and Social Care and Local Government CDOs offers an opportunity to put in place a collaborative, sector-wide and sector-supported plan for digital transformation in social care. This programme will also incorporate the delivery of the Connecting Care Social Care programme.</p>
Collaboration Appetite	<p>The appetite for, and commitment to, collaboration is currently very high and there is a significant opportunity to harness this to genuinely work together to deliver significant improvement in public service delivery and improved outcomes for service users.</p>
CDPS Review	<p>The recent CDPS review provides an opportunity to collectively reflect on and refine the core purpose and focus of CDPS, and ensure the organisation is focussing on activities that can help accelerate digital transformation in public sector organisations in Wales, and that their structure and funding adequately supports their purpose.</p>
Financial Climate	<p>Although the current financial climate is extremely challenging for councils, the budget pressures often lead to closer scrutiny of service delivery and performance.</p> <p>It also lends itself to an increase in willingness to collaborate and find economies of scale through joint activities.</p>
Emerging Technologies	<p>Despite some of the challenges outlined above, it is impossible to ignore the opportunities offered by the rapidly evolving tech landscape, particularly the opportunities offered by AI. If we can find ways to collaborate to share, learn, accelerate, and innovate, there is significant potential to improve services and deliver improved outcomes for the public.</p>



To better understand how local authorities collaborate and share knowledge and experience on developing digital, and to look at mechanisms to scale up and share good practice and innovation

28. There is a huge opportunity to achieve sector-wide digital transformation more quickly and at lower cost through sector-level collective action, rather than the same problems being tackled multiple times at an individual council level.
29. However, there are also many challenges to genuine collaboration across 22 autonomous and complex organisations, which are at different levels of digital maturity.
30. In early 2023, the CDO established the Local Government Digital Advisory Group (DAG), bringing together the 22 Chief Digital Officers* (or equivalent) from all councils in Wales. The purpose of the group is to:
 - a. Provide expertise and guidance to the WLGA Digital Team to ensure the projects and activities of the team reflect the needs of councils in Wales.
 - b. Identify opportunities for councils to work together on addressing digital challenges and agree how the WLGA Digital Team can support this collaboration and add the most value.(*It's worthy of note that only four councils in Wales have a Chief Digital Officer, and only three of those sit on the Senior Management Team of the council).
31. The group is chaired by local government and the engagement is very positive. The group met 5 times in 2024, with two full day workshops to share knowledge and good practice. Almost all meetings have over 80% of the councils in attendance. In April 2024, it was agreed that the previous SOCITM Wales group would be merged into the DAG to reduce duplication of effort and enable a streamlining of activities.
32. In 2024, the DAG also agreed to set up two sub-groups, facilitated by the WLGA Digital Team, one focussing on Robotic Process Automation (RPA) and Artificial Intelligence (AI), and the other focussing on Sustainable Futures. Both groups are now active with engagement and participation from most of the councils in Wales.
33. The RPA / AI group aims to create a platform for learning, sharing, and collaborating on RPA-related topics, such as best practices, tools, techniques, challenges, opportunities, and use cases. The RPA CoP also aims to promote a culture of innovation and continuous improvement, and to support the adoption and implementation of RPA across the organisations.
34. The Sustainable Futures group aims to explore and articulate the case for implementing new innovative digital business processes and solutions that help councils in Wales reduce operational costs.
35. The Local Government Chief Digital Office currently chairs, facilitates, or sits on over 25 groups, representing Welsh local government's digital interests, enabling a national view to be aggregated and shared, and information to be fed back to local authorities. These include:
 - a. CDO / CEO Leadership Group



- b. Welsh Government Cyber Programme Board
 - c. Cyber Assessment Framework Programme Board (Chair)
 - d. Welsh Government Cyber Resilience Advisory Group
 - e. AI Commission for Health and Social Care
 - f. Digital Inclusion Alliance Wales Steering Group
 - g. Connecting Care Local Government SRO Advisory Group
 - h. DHCW Connecting Care Programme Board
 - i. Connecting Wales Programme Board
 - j. Streamlining Welsh Benefits Programme Board
 - k. Data Cymru Board
 - l. Public Sector Broadband Aggregation (PSBA) Board
 - m. National DDaT Leadership Board for Health and Social Care
 - n. Digital Planning Strategic Advisory Group
 - o. Connecting Care Social Care Programme Board
 - p. Digital Projects Investment Fund Panel
 - q. Once for Scotland
 - r. UK CAF and Local Government Monthly Roundtable
36. The CDO also works with a broad range of organisations, both in Wales and beyond, to coordinate, inform, share and learn, including for example LOTI, Local Government Association, COSLA, Society of Innovation, Technology and Modernisation, SOLACE, CWMPAS, CDPS, Data Cymru, Welsh Government, DHCW, NHS, ADSS Cymru, Social Care Wales.
37. One of the core foundations of the work of the CDO and the digital team, is supporting and facilitating collaborative projects and activities for councils in Wales. Examples of some of the team's current collaborative projects include:
- a. **Connecting Care Social Care Programme** – this has been one of the most successful collaborative projects delivered by the CDO and team. Following significant frustration amongst councils around the transition from the former WCCIS programme to the new Connecting Care programme, and a desire to take control of the social care elements of the programme, the CDO established a Local Government SRO Advisory Group made up of the Directors of Social Services, and the digital leads from each of the 22 councils. The CDO also coordinated the development of a Connecting Care Social Care Programme business case which was submitted to Welsh Government in November 2024. This programme will form a key part of the Social Care Delivery Plan as outlined in 25 e. (above).
 - b. **Streamlining Welsh Benefits** – following the signing of the Welsh Benefits Charter by all councils in January 2024, the Welsh Government launched a streamlining Welsh benefits project. Recognising that senior leader buy-in and operational resource would be needed to drive the project forward, the CDO, in collaboration with the WLGA Policy Officer, established a local government SRO group to support the project. All councils are participating in this group and the WLGA is coordinating feeding local government needs and opinions



- into the wider discussion, including the programme Steering Group on which the CDO sits.
- c. **Schools MIS** – the schools management information system (MIS) landscape in Wales has faced disruption due to unfavourable changes in the operations of the dominant incumbent vendor. To address this, a project, supported by all 22 councils in Wales, was initiated to create a framework for collaboration among Welsh councils and the schools under their jurisdiction. The aim was to develop a consistent Once-for-Wales approach to procurement. Several key outcomes were achieved, including a best practice procurement strategy for each council to go to market, a flexible national system specification covering both statutory and common functional requirements, and legal advice with a Once-for-Wales negotiation to agree more favourable contractual terms.
 - d. **Cyber Assessment Framework** – all 22 local authorities (and the three Fire and Rescue Services) are working collaboratively to roll out the CAF in Wales (see 26 g. above).
 - e. **Thinqi** – the Learning Management System (LMS) project responded to the need for a future-proofed digital learning solution to meet the learning and development requirements of local authorities and their communities within Wales. A collaborative procurement arrangement was developed, establishing a nationwide contract accessible to the 22 councils, along with the WLGA, CDPS, and Social Care Wales. Organisations can install local content on their copy of Thinqi as well as utilising the growing library of shared national content available through the Learning Consortium Wales partnership under the national contract.
38. In terms of mechanisms to scale, share good practice and innovate, there are several things already in train, including:
- a. Case study / show and tell model – the WLGA Digital Team has developed a standardised template approach to sharing knowledge about successful digital projects. This includes looking at the project pre-requisites, digital maturity levels at the outset, skills and resources, the business case, outcomes, and measurement. Knowledge sharing needs to be meaningful and applicable. This approach is used regularly at the DAG workshops to enable digital leads to learn from each other.
 - b. Common Teams Platform – working with the Digital Advisory Group, the WLGA Digital Team is supporting the development of a common Teams platform for Welsh councils, which will provide an easily accessible platform that can be used to facilitate collaboration. Although Teams is used extensively by the digital team to host collaborative projects, communities of practice and governance groups, there remains some technical challenges to seamless collaboration via this platform.



- c. Social care plan – the plan will include mechanisms to review and evaluate existing digital in social care projects to identify good practice and share / scale as appropriate.
- d. Shared Resource Services (SRS) currently provides shared IT services for four councils in South Wales. In recent months, SRS has been working with their partners to develop a business case to extend the provision of services to also cover digital. The CDO has had initial discussions with SRS, and other councils, about the potential to develop shared services to support digital transformation in councils.
- e. The Model Council – we are currently investigating the potential to develop a model digital council framework and intend to carry out a piece of research shortly to look at how a framework could be established to support councils to be able to work towards an agreed best practice model for digital transformation.



Appendix 1

What does digital mean in and for Local Government?

Digital is a facilitator which can help the council and its service areas to improve outcomes for the citizens which they serve. Digital success will only be fully realised when digital is embedded in service areas, and the whole organisation is part of the journey.

However, there is no universally agreed definition of the scope of digital for local government. The below provides an overview of three key aims in local government that digital can help facilitate and includes examples of the breadth of the 'digital tools, technologies and approaches' which can support their achievement.

1. Improving Service Delivery

Offering services digitally, such as applying for permits, paying taxes, or accessing public records. This can make services more accessible and convenient for citizens. Some examples of the digital tools, technologies and approaches that can be applied to facilitate this include:

- User centred design
- User research
- User experience
- Process mapping
- Journey mapping
- Personas
- Content design
- Service design
- Patterns and components
- Web sites, apps, and bots
- Digital service standards

2. Improving Internal Efficiency

Streamlining internal operations through the application of digital tools, technologies, and approaches, which can improve productivity, reduce costs, and enhance collaboration among departments. Some examples of the digital tools, technologies and approaches that can be applied to facilitate this include:

- Digital procurement



- Software and applications
- End-to-end and front-to-back process mapping
- Business process re-engineering
- Policy and process review
- Regulation review
- Multi-disciplinary teams
- Digital standards
- Digital skills
- Data

3. Improving Public Trust and Engagement

Using digital platforms to communicate with residents, gather feedback, and involve them in decision-making processes. This can include social media, online surveys, and virtual town hall meetings. Providing open access to government data and information also helps build trust and ensure accountability. Some examples of the digital tools, technologies and approaches that can be applied to facilitate this include:

- Accessibility
- User engagement
- Apps and other digital platforms
- Data access
- Information governance
- Data repositories
- Social media

4. Cross Cutting Themes

To successfully address the three aims outlined above, there is also a need to address cross cutting, system-wide digital issues which include:

- Digital leadership
- Digital skills
- Digital inclusion
- Cyber resilience
- Digital Infrastructure
- Collaboration



Senedd Evidence from the WLGA

January 2025

Local Government and Housing Committee, Senedd Cymru Inquiry into Digital in Local Government

Lindsey Phillips, Chief Digital Officer (CDO) for Local Government

Welsh Local Government Association - The Voice of Welsh Councils

The Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) is a politically led cross party organisation that seeks to give local government a strong voice at a national level.

We represent the interests of local government and promote local democracy in Wales.

The 22 councils in Wales are our members and the 3 fire and rescue authorities and 3 national park authorities are associate members.

We believe that the ideas that change people's lives, happen locally.

Communities are at their best when they feel connected to their council through local democracy. By championing, facilitating, and achieving these connections, we can build a vibrant local democracy that allows communities to thrive.

Our ultimate goal is to promote, protect, support, and develop democratic local government and the interests of councils in Wales.

We'll achieve our vision by

- Promoting the role and prominence of councillors and council leaders
- Ensuring maximum local discretion in legislation or statutory guidance
- Championing and securing long-term and sustainable funding for councils.
- Promoting sector-led improvement
- Encouraging a vibrant local democracy, promoting greater diversity
- Supporting councils to effectively manage their workforce



Overview

1. This evidence paper addresses the inquiry terms of reference from the Local Government and Housing Committee as communicated by email on 02 December 2024.
2. The information contained within this evidence paper is based on:
 - a. A survey in December 2024 specifically relating to the Senedd inquiry and to which all 22 councils responded.
 - b. A survey about the Centre for Digital Public Services (CDPS) in October 2024 carried out to inform a review of CDPS, and to which 18 of the 22 councils responded.
 - c. Other information gathered by the WLGA Digital Team in the last 12 months (including from surveys / meetings / projects etc.) as relevant to this inquiry.
3. This evidence sits alongside the evidence submitted by the Chief Digital Officer for Local Government and has been produced jointly to minimise duplication. The two submissions should therefore be considered together.
4. Details of how the WLGA (via the CDO and the Digital Team) is supporting councils with some of the challenges outlined in this paper are captured in the CDO evidence document.
5. A very small number of illustrative examples of the work of councils in Wales have been included in this paper. They are a very small snapshot of the breadth of work taking place across Wales. Further good practice examples can be found in the Audit Wales '[Digital by Design?](#)' report.

Committee Terms of Reference

Current use of digital to design and improve public service provision around the needs of users

6. Digital tools and technologies can significantly enhance public service design and provision by focusing on user needs. In particular:
 - a. **User-Centred Design:** Digital tools enable the creation of services that are tailored to the specific needs and preferences of users. This involves engaging with users throughout the design process to gather feedback and ensure the services meet their expectations.
 - b. **Accessibility and Inclusivity:** Digital platforms can make public services more accessible to a wider audience, including those with disabilities or those living in remote areas. Ensuring that digital services are inclusive helps in bridging the digital divide.



7. All councils have some form of customer feedback loops which feed into the development of their digital strategies or the improvement of their digital services, though these vary in breadth and maturity.
8. There is a broad range of examples across Welsh councils of the use of customer feedback to iteratively improve digital services, examples include:
 - a. Anonymous submission of information via digital channels following feedback that customers do not want to create an account.
 - b. Improving booking processes and forms
 - c. Incorporating Application Programming Interfaces (APIs) to import information from other sources automatically
 - d. Reviewing and improving accessibility of web sites and other digital channels
 - e. Development of apps to improve customer options and ease of access
 - f. Automation of processes within services
 - g. Use of data analytics to improve services
9. A substantial percentage of councils carry out structured process mapping of services to enable improved service design (with 15 of 19 councils confirming that they have, or are planning, structured process mapping of council services). However, less than 20% described their process mapping as being 'mature' in terms of being embedded as part of service design and this is certainly an area of development for councils. There is also a broad range of approaches to identifying which services to map, including as part of digital transformation programme, legislative change, strategy priorities, services already under review, high volume services, high impact areas, and service area requests.
10. From a skills perspective, almost 75% of councils have some user centred design capabilities within their teams, including user accessibility, user experience, service design and content design. However, the remaining 25% have identified user-centred design skills as an area they are lacking.
11. There are also innovative examples of user centred design and customer engagement, for example Flintshire Council has a digital squad made up of volunteers, who support digital inclusion and consult with members of the public on service design.

Council Example – User Centred Design

Torfaen County Borough Council

- *Torfaen's Digital First Customer Strategy has three core ambitions – one of which is the provision of excellent and efficient services designed around the needs of their customers. A wide range of engagement with residents was undertaken when developing the strategy – including general and targeted in person events (50+ Forums, Accessibility Forums etc. and online).*



- *To facilitate the ambition of: ‘excellent and efficient services designed around the needs of their customers,’ they have developed a Service Redesign methodology which aligns with Lou Downes’ “Good Service Design” and the Digital Service Standards set out in the Digital Strategy for Wales.*
- *The digital team works with subject matter experts in different service areas to review services and identify opportunities for improvement based on an enhanced understanding of customer needs and frustrations, using tools like Customer Journey Mapping and Business Process Mapping.*
- *To support service areas to better understand their customers, they have developed a set of evidence-based customer personas which are used to demonstrate the different ways a customer may interact with a particular service.*
- *They also capture customer satisfaction in an effort to identify additional opportunities to improve service and process design based on customer feedback.*

Council Example – Digital Channels

Cardiff Council

The council has developed and deployed a range of digital channels to enable citizens to engage effectively with the council.

The Cardiff Council App:

- *Since its launch in 2018, the Cardiff App has been downloaded 104,000 times.*
- *It supports approximately 87,000 interactions per month, highlighting its role as a vital tool for citizen engagement.*

The Council Website:

- *The website attracts an average of 250,000 visits per month, with 77.6% of these visits originating from mobile devices (Apple and Android compatible).*
- *It processes £5 million in online payments monthly and handles over 50,000 waste and recycling enquiries, in addition to facilitating planning applications, school admissions, and providing term date information.*

Bobi the Chatbot:

- *Bobi supports 8,000 interactions per month, providing citizens with the ability to engage outside of standard operating hours, including evenings and weekends.*

Citizen Preferences for Digital Services:

Where comparable reports or requests are available across different channels, Cardiff citizens demonstrate a strong preference for digital options:

- *Website: 69.6%*
- *App: 24.8%*



- *Phone Call: 5.6%*

User-Centric Development:

At the core of Cardiff's digital development strategy is a commitment to understanding and addressing the needs of users. Their experience demonstrates that when the digital experience is intuitive and efficient, citizens naturally prefer these channels.

However, they remain acutely aware of the need to support those who may be digitally disadvantaged or disengaged. To ensure inclusivity, they continue to provide telephone and face-to-face channels alongside their digital offerings.

12. The Centre for Digital Public Services (CDPS) exists to support Welsh public service providers to design better services. Services that are designed around the needs of the people who use them and are accessible and inclusive.
13. Welsh councils are eager to see CDPS deliver more tangible benefits and outcomes for local government. They are looking for more clarity on the purpose of CDPS and how to access their services and support. Aligning projects more closely with local government needs and understanding their priorities and pressures would enable CDPS to better support the aims of local government
14. Going forward, it is important to ensure that the work of CDPS delivers tangible outcomes for local government, in line with local, regional, and national needs and priorities, and that their priorities are clearly communicated. User centred design is a key area in which CDPS could focus to bring sector wide benefits.

Long-term planning and development of digital across the local government sector

15. 95% of councils in Wales have a current digital strategy, and the remaining one is due to be published imminently. Most of these strategies cover a 3-to-5-year period, which reflects the balance needed to respond to rapidly changing technology while focusing on longer-term outcomes.
16. These strategies underpin annual service planning and delivery, but councils note that budget constraints and short-term budgets / cyclical grant funding significantly restricts the ability to carry out long term planning of digital projects, and hampers innovation in digital delivery.
17. Capacity is also a challenge – the pace of change (for example around Artificial Intelligence or AI) and the lack of ability to horizon scan, get in front of and plan, for future opportunities, is challenging. This significantly hampers development of capability at a time when digital can offer a genuine solution to service design challenges and provide cost saving opportunities.



The opportunities and challenges to moving the digital agenda forward within the sector

Challenges

18. A broad range of challenges to digital transformation and the ability to capitalise on the significant potential digital offers were identified by councils.

19. These include:

- a. Finance and Budgets: Councils face limited funding and short-term funding cycles which restrict the ability to invest in digital transformation.
- b. Culture: Councils often face resistance to change among staff or leadership which can slow progress and necessitate additional resources for change management. Some councils experience a lack of digital leadership at operational and political levels.
- c. Recruitment and Retention: Councils have difficulty competing with higher salaries in other sectors (especially health) and the market for key digital skills is extremely competitive.
- d. Capacity: Councils often have limited resources to manage day-to-day operations and carry out digital transformation which requires dedicated resources and space for innovation.
- e. Capabilities: Many councils have identified digital skills gaps in their workforce and a need for upskilling existing staff. Funding is not always available for investment in training. The rapid pace of technology changes exacerbates capability gaps.
- f. Market and Technology: Supply chain issues, affordability of solutions, and procurement challenges often lead to councils struggling to deploy the best solutions to improve their services. Many councils also have significant challenges with legacy systems that require replacement.
- g. Cyber Security: As systems become more digitised, the risk of cyberattacks increases, necessitating robust cybersecurity measures and compliance frameworks, requiring additional funding, skills, and capacity.
- h. Digital Inclusion: Councils must ensure all residents can access services – investment in inclusive technology solutions or provision of non-digital channels alongside digital channels can be costly.

Opportunities

20. Although there are significant challenges as outlined above, councils also identified a broad range of opportunities for digital transformation in local government.



21. These include:

- a. Collaboration: There are significant future opportunities for collaboration across Welsh local government in terms of digital. By working together, we can continue to share resources, expertise, and best practices, leading to more efficient and innovative service delivery. There are also opportunities for more shared systems and services in future and increased collaborative procurement to ensure best value.
- b. User Centred Design: The increasing awareness of the importance of genuine UCD in service design will enable service delivery to be radically reconsidered rather than bolting on a digital façade to what are sometimes poor service models.
- c. New and emerging technologies: AI, RPA, privacy enhancing technologies for data access, cloud services etc. offer significant opportunities to streamline processes, improve service delivery for citizens and realise cost savings.
- d. Community Engagement: Digital platforms offer councils genuine opportunities for better communication and engagement with their communities, and opportunities for communities to be involved in decision-making and policy shaping. Improved digital infrastructure and access to genuinely accessible services can reduce the digital divide and ensure everyone can take advantage of the opportunities that digital presents.
- e. Strategic National Approach: National digital investment to deliver strategic programmes outcomes could accelerate delivery of digital transformation across councils especially where it is aligned to agreed priorities. The Connecting Care Social Care programme is a good example of this (see CDO evidence for more details).
- f. Private Sector: Collaborating and developing partnerships with tech companies can bring significant benefits to councils' transformation efforts.
- g. Data: There are significant opportunities to use data to inform service design and decision-making. Leveraging data analytics can support more informed decisions, identify trends, optimise resource allocation, and improve public services.
- h. Cybersecurity: Collective action to strengthen cyber resilience measures will bring significant benefits to councils, this includes work already going on in terms of WARP, CymruSOC and the Cyber Assessment Framework.
- i. Sustainable Practices: Digital offers a breadth of opportunities to support councils' sustainability efforts, such as reducing carbon footprints through smart energy management systems and promoting eco-friendly practices.



To better understand how local authorities collaborate and share knowledge and experience on developing digital, and to look at mechanisms to scale up and share good practice and innovation

Collaboration and Knowledge Sharing

22. All councils recognise that collaboration and knowledge sharing among local authorities are essential for driving digital transformation effectively. Collaboration and scaling good practice reduce duplication and allow for economies of scale.
23. Collaboration and sharing good practice can also enable accelerated innovation and by building on proven solutions, local authorities can implement modern technologies faster and with less risk.
24. These collaborative efforts can help build a resilient digital ecosystem in local government, ensuring that councils can collectively address challenges such as cyber threats, funding gaps, and skill shortages.
25. Councils in Wales actively participate in a broad range of forums that support collaboration and knowledge sharing on digital, and identified a substantial number of groups, forums and partnerships which facilitate the sharing of knowledge, good practice and experience locally, regionally, nationally and beyond, including for example:
 - a. Welsh Local Government Association Digital Advisory Group and its sub-groups and communities of practice (RPA and AI / Sustainable Futures / Content Design)
 - b. Public Services Boards
 - c. Corporate Joint Committees
 - d. Economic Wellbeing and Regional Economic Sub – Committees
 - e. City Deal Digital Boards
 - f. Regional Learning & Skills Partnership
 - g. Centre for Digital Public Services Communities of Practice
 - h. SOCITM UK – Society for Innovation, Technology & Modernisation
 - i. Local Government Association Groups
 - j. UK Government Central Digital and Data Office
 - k. UK Authority
 - l. Public Sector Digital Transformation Forum
 - m. CymruSOC Security Operations Centre
 - n. WLGA Cyber Assessment Framework
 - o. Welsh Government HWB Technical Advisory Group
 - p. TEC Cymru
 - q. Supplier networks, e.g. Microsoft Local Government Digital Innovation Forum, Goss ICM Community
 - r. WLGA Connecting Care SRO Advisory Group
 - s. WLGA Streamlining Welsh Benefits SRO Advisory Group
 - t. Data Cymru Strategic Data Leads Network



- u. A broad range of local / regional groups (e.g. Get RCT online; SRS collaboration board).
26. Many councils recognise the value of the WLGA Digital Advisory Group (DAG) in bringing together the sector in Wales to collaborate, identify shared priorities and agree actions. The group is taking forward a breadth of activities (see CDO evidence for further details), but it is recognised that more can be done to improve knowledge sharing and scaling up of good practice (see below). During 2024, the DAG agreed that the SOCITM Wales group would be merged into the DAG to avoid duplication. There is therefore now one key group (DAG) of all 22 digital leads who meet regularly, supported by the WLGA Digital Team, to identify priorities and collaboration opportunities.

Council Example – Partnership Working and Evaluation

Powys County Council

- *To strengthen their arrangements for securing effectiveness, efficiency and economy through partnership working in delivering their Digital Strategy and plans, Powys continues to undertake regular stakeholder consideration, evaluation, and mapping exercises to identify and prioritise the organisations they need to work with and identify opportunities for greater collaboration.*
- *They review and assess the effectiveness of those partnerships on an annual basis, as part of wider benefits monitoring and annual reporting.*
- *They continue to utilise a broad range of local, regional, and national forums to engage, consider and deliver on opportunities for wider collaboration with public sector partners and avoid duplication (many of which are outlined in the list above).*

Opportunities for Scaling Up, Sharing Good Practice, and Innovation

27. Councils can work in silos, leading to fragmented progress and missed opportunities to leverage shared insights. Addressing this challenge requires a systematic approach to connect councils, share experiences, and develop collaborative solutions.
28. There are many identified barriers to genuine collaboration, but some of the challenges that need to be overcome include:
- a. Ensuring the interoperability of systems so that digital tools can seamlessly integrate across councils and enable scaling of solutions.



- b. Developing clear guidelines on data privacy, security, and usage are essential for collaboration.
 - c. Overcoming resistance to change and aligning diverse organisational priorities requires targeted change management efforts.
 - d. Recognising the cost of collaboration, and funding this accordingly, both in terms of collaboration support resource and releasing appropriate resources within the organisations.
29. Suggestions from councils on how to improve the scaling up of digital solutions, share good practice and innovation, and encourage collaboration include:
- a. Consistency and standards
 - i. Greater standardisation and consistency of digital approach across councils to ensure everyone moves forward together, and that a baseline measurement of 'as is' and 'to be' is possible.
 - b. Joint Digital Projects:
 - i. Partnering on large-scale initiatives such as shared platforms for service delivery, cybersecurity, or data integration to reduce costs and accelerate innovation.
 - ii. More national business cases such as that developed for the Connecting Care social care programme would be beneficial.
 - c. Establishing Central Repositories of Best Practices / Other Resources:
 - i. Develop a centralised, easily accessible online platform where councils can share case studies, tools, templates, and successful digital strategies.
 - ii. Include metrics or success indicators to guide authorities on the potential ROI or impact of adopting specific practices.
 - iii. Wales Councils Application Store – centrally held repository of built applications e.g. PowerApps developed and shared.
 - iv. Wales Councils Process Map store – centrally held repository of efficient business process maps available to be shared.
 - d. Scaling Up Through Shared Frameworks:
 - i. Standardised frameworks for digital development to simplify collaboration by aligning objectives, processes, and technological choices.
 - ii. Adopting modular solutions that can be scaled or customised based on individual council needs while retaining interoperability.
 - e. Building Communities of Practice (CoPs):
 - i. Organise thematic groups focused on areas like AI adoption, Robotic Process Automation (RPA), data governance, and citizen engagement – the WLGA Digital Advisory Group already has several groups, as does CDPS, and these need to be strengthened and developed.



- ii. Encourage participation across roles, from IT specialists to service managers, to ensure a comprehensive understanding of challenges and solutions.
- f. Funding and Incentives for Collaboration:
 - i. Leverage Welsh Government grants or funding programs to support inter-council collaborations, with conditions that require the sharing of outcomes and learnings.
 - ii. Introduce incentive schemes that reward councils for creating and disseminating replicable digital innovations.
 - iii. Better allocation of funding, including across social care and health, to facilitate national strategic projects.
- g. Engaging Private Sector Partners:
 - i. Collaborate with technology providers to pilot scalable solutions such as Beam / Magic Notes, offering a pathway to tailor innovations for wider public sector use.
 - ii. Establish public-private partnerships to co-develop tools that address shared challenges, such as accessibility or resource optimisation.
- h. National Digital Leadership Initiatives:
 - i. Develop a national leadership program that equips decision-makers with skills and strategies for scaling up digital practices and encouraging innovation.
 - ii. Encourage the formation of cross-authority mentorship schemes where councils with advanced digital capabilities support those in earlier stages.

Council Example – Joint Working

Shared Resource Service (SRS)

Torfaen, Blaenau Gwent, Monmouthshire, and Newport councils (along with Gwent Police) have worked with the SRS over the last 12-18 months to agree a set of shared priorities and form multi-partner project teams to take these priorities forward. This has undoubtedly led to quicker realisation of benefits through a collaborative approach which draws on good practice and knowledge sharing – for example all partners now on the same contact centre solution, targeted work and sharing of findings in relation to AI and Automation to reduce duplication and to support implementation further and wider than could have been achieved individually.

The partners in SRS are now considering expanding the services of SRS beyond ICT to establish a collaborative arrangement across the whole Digital, Data and Technology (DDaT) agenda.

Agenda Item 6

Local Government and Housing Committee

12 February 2025 – papers to note cover sheet

Paper no.	Issue	From	Action point
6	Private rented sector	Propertymark	To note
7	Review of the Public Bill and Member Bill processes	Business Committee	To note
8	City and Growth Deals	Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Energy and Planning	To note
9	P-06-1483 Give neighbours their say when holiday let owners start applying for licences	Petitions Committee	To note

John Griffiths MS
Chair of the Senedd Local Government and Housing Committee
Welsh Parliament
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1SN

27 January 2025

Dear John,

Re: Two months compensation for tenants for receive a Section 173 possession notice

As the UK's leading professional membership body for property agents, PropertyMark was delighted to provide both written and oral evidence to the Senedd Local Government and Housing Committee's Inquiry into the Private Rented Sector in Wales, which of course was part of the work of the committee that you chair. We were equally pleased that the Committee has published its recommendations which have now been considered by the Welsh Government.

Overall, I would like to congratulate you and the Committee's work on the inquiry, and we think the report includes recommendations that will improve fairness for letting agents, landlords and tenants as well as access to the private rented sector. We were particularly pleased to see that the Committee recommended that local authorities should keep a database to signpost older people and people with a disability into suitably adapted properties, when there is a short fall in social housing or when there is suitable private accommodation near their support networks.

However, I am concerned to learn that the Committee also recommended that tenants in receipt of a Section 173 possession notice, should be awarded two months final rent as compensation. This has been agreed by the Welsh Government and they will engage with stakeholders and report back with conclusions by the end of April 2025. We are concerned for two reasons:

- Firstly, the Renting Homes (Wales) Act 2016 already provides tenants with six months' notice for no-fault evictions, offering greater protection than the legislation in England when a tenant is given a possession notice in Wales.
- Secondly, introducing further financial penalties for landlords is counterproductive when they already face rising costs from tax increases, higher mortgage rates, and repair costs, risks restricting the supply of rental homes and driving up rents for tenants.

Boosting supply is the most effective way to stabilise rents and prevent further market distortions. Alternatively, the Welsh Government should improve supply by building more social homes and launching a review of all taxes relating to private landlords.

We have made representations to the Cabinet Secretary for Local Government and Housing outlining our concerns. However, I would also be grateful if you would consider meeting with representatives from PropertyMark, to discuss the issue in more detail. This would be an excellent opportunity to not only discuss our concerns over this recommendation, but to also highlight how we could support the other recommendations and how we can support future work that your committee is considering. If you would like to take this opportunity forward, your office can liaise with Tim Thomas, Policy and Campaigns Officer at PropertyMark via timthomas@propertymark.co.uk [REDACTED]

I look forward to hearing from you.

Best wishes,



Nathan Emerson MNAEA MARLA MNAEA(Comm.)
Chief Executive Officer
PropertyMark

Senedd Committees

21 January 2025

Dear Chair,

Business Committee review of the Public Bill and Member Bill processes

The Business Committee is reviewing the Senedd's processes relating to Public Bills and Member Bills. We would like to hear your views on what is working well and what could be improved.

Annexed to this letter are the terms of reference for our work and a list of the areas of focus for our initial evidence gathering we have identified to date. We would welcome your views on the matters within our terms of reference which are relevant to your work, including, but not necessarily limited to, the areas of focus. If there are other matters of relevance to our terms of reference that you would like to raise in your evidence, please do so.

We would be grateful if you could provide your written evidence **by Friday 28 March 2025**. You can either send your submission to SeneddBusiness@senedd.wales or respond to specific questions on each of the areas of focus set out in the [online form](#) available as part of our [open consultation](#).

To ensure that anyone who would like to share their views about the legislative processes is able to do so, we have also issued an [open consultation](#). We would be grateful if you could share the consultation with your stakeholders.

Yours sincerely,



The Rt Hon Elin Jones MS

Chair of the Business Committee

Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg. We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English.



Annex: terms of reference and areas of focus for the initial evidence gathering phase

Public Bill process

Terms of reference

To explore options for improving the operation and effectiveness of the Senedd's scrutiny of Public Bills introduced in accordance with Standing Order 26, by reviewing experiences in the Sixth Senedd (and previous Seneddau where relevant), including:

- Relevant procedures, practices, conventions, culture and ways of working.
- The experience of legislating in a hybrid environment.

Areas of focus for the initial evidence gathering phase

- The overall effectiveness of the Senedd's consideration of Public Bills and opportunities for the public and stakeholders to contribute to the Senedd's scrutiny.
- The timetabling of Senedd scrutiny of Public Bills, including: the establishment of Bill timetables in accordance with SO26.7 (and the factors taken into account when timetables are established); and the timing of amendment tabling deadlines, the publication of Marshalled Lists/Groupings Lists and proceedings.
- The explanatory materials and information provided during the Public Bill scrutiny process, including: the requirements for Explanatory Memorandums specified in Standing Orders; the timing of written responses to Stage 1 committee reports; the provision and presentation of other information during scrutiny (such as Welsh Government-provided documents or Senedd Research publications); arrangements regarding explanatory text about the purpose and effect of amendments; and the availability, accessibility and clarity of the guidance available to Members and the public about the legislative process.
- How admissibility of amendments is assessed, and how amendments to Bills are debated and disposed of.
- How the Senedd is asked to agree to the financial consequences of Bills and amendments, including the movement of Financial Resolutions and whether it is sufficiently clear how 'significant' should be interpreted for the purposes of SO26.69-26.71.
- Whether the rules relating to the optional 'Further' amending stages are clear enough.

- The rules relating to emergency Bills.
- Whether the experience of legislating in a hybrid context, in which Members and others may participate virtually or in person, has had any impact on the Senedd's scrutiny of Public Bills.
- Any considerations for the Public Bill process arising from the increase from 60 to 96 Members in 2026 or the increase in the frequency of ordinary Senedd elections from every five years to every four years.

Member Bill process

Terms of reference

To explore options for improving the operation and effectiveness of the Senedd's Member Bill process, by:

- Reviewing experiences in the Sixth Senedd (and previous Seneddau where relevant), including relevant procedures, practices, conventions, culture and ways of working prior to a Member Bill's introduction (including but not limited to the way in which Members are selected for the opportunity to propose a Bill, the process for gaining 'leave to proceed', and the level of information Members are required to provide at these stages).
- Identifying any potential implications for the Member Bill process arising from the increase in the number of Members of the Senedd.
- Identifying and, where appropriate, raising with relevant decision-makers including the Senedd Commission and the Independent Remuneration Board of the Senedd, issues relating to the resource and support available to Members during the Member Bill process.

Areas of focus for the initial evidence gathering phase

- The overall effectiveness of the Member Bill process.
- How Members are selected for the opportunity to propose a Bill.
- How Members are granted leave to introduce Bills.
- The rules about what can, or cannot, be included in a Member Bill, i.e. the 'scope' of such Bills.

- Any considerations for the Member Bill process arising from the increase from 60 to 96 Members in 2026 or the increase in the frequency of ordinary Senedd elections from every five years to every four years.
- The implications of the above for the support and resources available to Members wanting to propose Bills.



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Eich cyf/Your ref
Ein cyf/Our ref: C&GDMOU25

Mike Hedges MS
Legislation, Justice and Constitution Committee
Senedd Cymru

05 February 2025

Dear Mike,

In accordance with the inter-institutional relations agreement, I am writing to notify you that a Memorandum of Understanding between the UK Government and Welsh Government was published on 28 January 2025. It can be found [here](#).

This Memorandum of Understanding summarises and formalises the overarching principles and approach to the use of UK Government funding for city and regional growth deals agreed between the UK Government and the Welsh Government and local authority regional partnerships.

I have also copied this letter to the Economy, Trade, and Rural Affairs Committee; Local Government and Housing Committee and the Finance Committee.

Yours sincerely,

Rebecca Evans AS/MS
Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Energy and Planning
Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros yr Economi, Ynni a Chynllunio

Canolfan Cyswllt Cyntaf / First Point of Contact Centre:
0300 0604400

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CF99 1SN

Correspondence.Rebecca.Evans@gov.wales
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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

John Griffiths MS,

Chair,

Local Government and Housing Committee

5 February 2025

Dear John,

Petition P-06-1483 Give neighbours their say when holiday let owners start applying for licences

The Petitions Committee considered the above petition, submitted by Jacqueline Cullimore, at its 20 January meeting.

The Committee agreed to highlight the petition to you for consideration in the Local Government and Housing Committee's forward work programme, as well as write to the Cabinet Secretary for Housing and Local Government seeking further views on the issue. Members agreed to keep the petition open pending your responses.

The full details of the Committee's consideration of the petition, including the correspondence and the actions agreed by the Committee can be found here: [P-06-1483 Give neighbours their say when holiday let owners start applying for licences](#).

I would be grateful if you could send any response by e-mail to the clerking team at petitions@senedd.wales.

Yours sincerely,



Carolyn Thomas MS
Chair

Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg.

We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English.