



Senedd Evidence from the Chief Digital Officer

January 2025

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

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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	Councils are large and complex organisations, which makes it difficult to take advantage of digital in an agile and flexible manner. 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. Delivering hundreds of disparate services can also make prioritisation, and particularly collaborative prioritisation, challenging. Further support is needed for senior management teams to drive the significant changes needed to realise digital transformation across the organisations.
Digital Maturity and Foundations	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.
Sector Skills and Capacity	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>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