

**TITLE OF REPORT:** Local Digital Declaration

**REPORT OF:** Mike Barker, Strategic Director, Corporate Services  
and Governance

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### **Purpose of the Report**

1. Cabinet is asked to endorse and recommend the Council sign-up to the Local Digital Declaration.

### **Background**

2. The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) and the Government Digital Service (GDS) have launched an initiative to support local government to design and build good digital public services.
3. Since 2011 central government, led by the GDS, have invested heavily in digital approaches and skills to improve how technology is used to modernise the delivery of public services. Key features of their programme are: designing services that best meet the needs of citizens, rather than the needs of organisations; and, using technologies that are an enabler, rather than a barrier to delivering digital public service transformation.
4. Following the success of digital transformation within central government and increasing demand from local government to support digital public service transformation, MHCLG has set-up a team to coordinate the sharing of tools, services and learning between councils and with central government.
5. Becoming a signatory to the Local Digital Declaration is a first step for the Council to access the new support and services being offered. Allowing the Council to build upon the progress already achieved on the Gateshead Digital programme.

### **The Declaration**

6. As a signatory, the Council would be agreeing to certain commitments around how it will govern and deliver digital public service transformation. Appendix 1 provides the detail of the commitments.
7. The Local Digital Declaration (appendix 2) establishes a collective ambition for local public service transformation that builds on the models and approaches developed within central government. This ambition is set out in the following 5 principles:

- a) We will go even further to redesign our services around the needs of the people using them. This means continuing to prioritise citizen and user needs above professional, organisational, and technological silos.
- b) We will ‘fix our plumbing’ to break our dependence on inflexible and expensive technology that does not join effectively. This means on insisting on modular building block for the IT we rely on, and open standards to give a common structure to the data we create.
- c) We will design safe, secure, and useful ways of sharing information to build trust among our partners and citizens to better support the most vulnerable members of our communities, and to target our resources more effectively.
- d) We will demonstrate digital leadership, creating the conditions for genuine organisational transformation to happen, and challenging all those we work with to embrace the Local Digital Declaration.
- e) We will embed an open culture that values, incentivises and expects digital ways of working from every member of our workforce. This means working in the open wherever we can, sharing our experience, working collaboratively with other organisations and reusing good practice.

### **Funding Opportunities**

- 8. To support local and central government to meet the ambitions outlined in paragraph 6, a £7.5 million Local Digital Fund has been launched by MHCLG. Once the Council has signed up to the declaration it will be eligible to submit a valid bid for funding of up to a maximum of £100,000.
- 9. Submitted bids must demonstrate how the Council is committing to the ambitions and standards of the declaration and how a proposal will stimulate and support digital service transformation in a collaborative way that benefits the wider local government sector.
- 10. Further funding will be made available in 2019 to support the training of senior leaders in digital skills, and training those involved in the delivery of digital services.

### **Proposal**

- 11. It is proposed that the Council signs up to the Local Digital Declaration (Appendix 2).
- 12. As a signatory of the declaration the Council will have opportunities to build upon the successes of its Digital Programme. It will also enable the Council to

receive support and expertise from central government and provide access to learning and solutions from other councils.

13. This support from the MHCLG, in addition to the funding opportunities, will enable the Council to innovate in ways it may not on its own.

### **Recommendations**

14. Cabinet is asked to endorse the Local Digital Declaration and recommend it to Council for endorsement and approval.

For the following reasons:

To ensure that the Council is able to access the support and funding required to deliver good digital public services that meet best practice and standards.

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**CONTACT:** Roger Abbott/Nick Lamb

extension: 2188/2073

## APPENDIX 1

### Policy Context

1. The declaration builds upon the Council's approach to digital public service transformation as agreed in the Council's strategy *Digital Gateshead 2015 – 2020*.
2. The declaration also aligns with the Council's Thrive agenda: emphasizing the importance of understanding the needs of our communities in the delivery of modern public services; encouraging officers to take the initiative and be creative in trying innovative approaches and working with colleagues across the Council and with other local councils.

### Background

3. As a signatory to the declaration the Council would have to demonstrate commitment to common standards for governance and delivery of digital public service transformation. Detail of those commitments are included in appendix 2.
4. The commitments include references to two standards documents created by GDS *The Technology Code of Practice* and *Digital Service Standard*. The Technology Code of Practice includes 12 criteria to help design, build and buy better technology, including but not limited to:
  - a) The use of open source technology and open standards, giving access to a range of solutions at lower cost;
  - b) Taking a cloud first approach to limit the cost of developing, keeping services secure and changing services as user needs develop;
  - c) Sharing and reusing technology and functionality across services to avoid duplication;
  - d) Making better use of data so that only the data needed is collected, that is made available to users where data is held about them and the adoption of an open by default approach to publication.
5. The Digital Service Standard includes standards for designing and building digital public services, including but not limited to:
  - a) Understand user needs before designing or building a service;
  - b) Using agile methods to iterate and improve frequently;
  - c) Consider end-to-end processes that are multi-channel;
  - d) Decisions that are made on data and performance are captured for use in continued service improvement.

6. Agile is a significant feature of the standards, outlined above. There is a distinction between how the Council currently understands the term. The references to agile in this report relates to the project management approach (an alternative to traditional methods, such as Prince2, that places emphasis on iterative over sequential delivery of projects) rather than the term widely used related to mobile, flexible working policies/approaches.

### **Consultation**

7. The Leader of the Council has been consulted on this report.

### **Alternative Options**

8. Cabinet can decide not to sign-up to the Local Digital Declaration, however, this will close the door to opportunities of funding and training that could support the development of better and more efficient digital public services.

### **Implications of Recommended Option**

#### **9. Resources:**

- a) **Financial Implications** – The Strategic Director, Corporate Resources confirms that there are no financial implications arising directly from this report. Any costs incurred in supporting any bids would be met from existing budgets.
  - b) **Human Resources Implications** – There are no HR implications arising from this report.
  - c) **Property Implications** - There are no property implications arising directly from this report.
10. **Risk Management Implication** – There are no direct risk management implications arising from this report.
  11. **Equality and Diversity Implications** – There are no equality and diversity implications arising directly from this report.
  12. **Crime and Disorder Implications** – There are no crime and disorder implications arising directly from this report.
  13. **Health Implications** – There are no health implications arising from this report.
  14. **Sustainability Implications** – There are no sustainability implications
  15. **Human Rights Implications** - There are no human rights implications arising directly from this report.

16. **Area and Ward Implications** – There are no direct implications arising direct from this report.

**Background Information:**

Local Digital Declaration, GDS Digital Service Standard, GDS Technology Code of Practice