North Lanarkshire Council
Report

Transformation and Digitisation Committee

☒approval ☒noting   **Ref** KH/LJ   **Date** 02/09/20

COVID-19 - Response and Recovery - Business Solutions

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Executive Summary

The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic required an unprecedented and fast faced response across the council, and with partners, local organisations and communities.

Responsible for driving the provision of modern digital services and wide scale transformation across the council, the Business Solutions team played a crucial role in further developing and enabling the infrastructure, hardware, software, and solutions to ensure delivery of not just the most critical services required to respond to the pandemic, but also many business as usual activities.

This report highlights the level of activity deployed by Business Solutions in response to the pandemic and its subsequent recovery.

Accelerated enhancements to the council's infrastructure supported new methods of service delivery and, with the council's digital workplace implementation (as part of the transformation programme, Digital NL) also significantly accelerated, the council is moving forward, at pace, to secure sustainability for these new working arrangements.

The service showed its ability to be flexible and adaptable to changing environments, re-provisioning staff to provide back office support to a range of programmes supporting the most vulnerable people in our communities. This included the development of a new system which provided a secure platform for end to end support for those identified as shielding or requiring additional support through the national hotline announced by the Scottish Government.

In addition, governance frameworks were updated to accurately reflect current and future practices. Further details of the work carried out are included in this report.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the Transformation and Digitisation Committee:-
   1) Considers the work of Business Solutions and the significant impact of the work of the service during the pandemic, and
   2) Notes the impact of Recovery Planning on previously approved DigitalNL Year 2 Work Packages.

The Plan for North Lanarkshire

Priority   All priorities

Ambition statement   (18) Ensure our digital transformation is responsive to all people's needs and enable access to the services they need

1.   Background

1.1   As Members are aware, the first reports of coronavirus (COVID-19) emerged from China in late 2019. The virus spread rapidly across the world and on 11 March 2020 the World Health Organisation (WHO) declared COVID-19 a pandemic.

1.2   On 23 March 2020 the UK Government introduced various measures to slow down the spread of the virus by informing the whole of the United Kingdom to stay at home (except in some limited circumstances).

1.3   In response, various measures were implemented by the council to prevent the spread of the virus which impacted on the delivery of services.

1.4   During this time Business Solutions played an increasingly significant role in providing the infrastructure to support new ways of delivering services, standing up new solutions to support the most vulnerable and influencing national decision making.

2.   Report

2.1   During the early stages of "lockdown" a number of simultaneous activities allowed Business Solutions to mobilise, reallocate and efficiently implement resources to deliver alternative services and escalate technology builds to deliver essential services. This was achieved whilst mitigating risk and ensuring transparency and accountability around the crisis response, decision making and use of resources.

2.2   **Work from Home - Infrastructure requirements**

From 23 March 2020 the council has complied with the *work from home where possible* requirement. This necessitated the mobilisation of all available technologies to allow the delivery of services and support to employees as they adapt to change, become flexible in their approach and embrace new technology.

As you would expect this has been particularly challenging given the nature and speed of change required. Pre-23 March 2020, normal home working utilisation was less than 100 users per day, with the system scoped to accommodate a maximum of around 500 users per day. The maximum pre-COVID-19 had never been experienced.

Limited capacity (e.g. bandwidth, licensing, hardware capability), meant that initially restrictions were in place for Any Connect, with services requested to access systems within specified two hour slots approved by the council's Strategic Recovery Group. Once in place and operating effectively, the service was then built upon through the re-provisioning and re-prioritising of hardware and bandwidth capability, with open access available to all from 30 March 2020.

At the same time, there was a significant demand created in respect of moving from physical to online meetings. Any traffic associated with online meetings had to traverse through the same council internet hardware as Any Connect and therefore had a

detrimental effect on the ability to continue to deliver services. In the early weeks the use of online video meetings was controlled to allow further solutions to be developed to minimise or remove their impact on the network.

The introduction of WebEx, with suitable configuration, allowed the off-boarding of associated traffic and minimised the impact to the core broadband capacity.

The subsequent introduction of additional remote working capacity, through AnyConnect, incorporating additional portals (allowing segregating and prioritising of staff), and the reuse of existing school internet to increase corporate capacity (now reverted back), resulted in a steady controlled transition to return to operation but predominately from home.

The improvements deployed accommodated the average of 1,900 daily users now working on AnyConnect, with approximately 3,900 remote access tokens in place across services. 100 WebEx licenses are in use and this platform is very well used for online video meetings.

Demand for laptops is high, with 300 already deployed across services. Business Solutions has secured further capital funding for the refresh of an additional 2,000 devices this year, the majority expected to be laptops. In addition, funding has been allocated for the redevelopment of the council's home working solution, Any Connect, to ensure long term sustainability to support new models of service delivery, and build resilience in the event of further COVID-19 waves.

2.3 Supporting Services for the Most Vulnerable (Shielding)

Following the introduction (on 23 March 2020) by the Scottish Government of shielding restrictions, telephony systems were quickly mobilised to allow targeted calls to those on the NHS lists identified as being in vulnerable categories. North Lanarkshire Council was the first council to introduce both inbound and outbound calls to support the most vulnerable in our communities. In early April a national hotline number was announced by the Scottish Government which directed calls straight to the local authority the caller resided in.

In parallel to the telephony technology being in place, Agilisys, the council's System Integrator Partner announced its intention to work with Microsoft (MS) to develop a nationally available support solution based on the MS Dynamics platform. The first "show and tell" for Scottish local authorities took place on 30 March 2020. With a strong relationship with Agilisys already in place, and the locally developed shielding questionnaire adopted as the national template by SOLACE (Society of Local Authority Chief Executives), the council was approached to work with Agilisys to develop the bespoke solution (Helping Hands) to meet the requirements of the Scottish Government, partner agencies and local delivery team.

Representatives from Business Solutions acted in an advisory capacity for the national group and a reference point for other Scottish local authorities implementing Helping Hands. North Lanarkshire was the first authority in Scotland to stand up the live solution on 27 April 2020. Over the next 2 weeks over 5,000 back records were entered in the system, 200+ contact agents were trained and reports for the team delivering solutions were developed, tested and implemented. The solution facilitated support for the 12,726 people on the shielding list, allowed the delivery of 6,408 food parcels and enabled 1,147 referrals to voluntary groups, with 225 referrals to social work, the financial inclusion team or NHS Lanarkshire.

The data from Helping Hands was also linked to the GIS support team within Business Solutions building interactive maps and identifying local services, such as shops, pharmacies and community hubs, along with current opening times and support numbers for communities.

A post and print file was created to allow 18,500 families, eligible for free school meals, to receive vouchers from Education and Families to support financial hardship.

A shielding and vulnerable people App has been developed and will be put into production should a second wave of COVID-19 hit.

2.4   **Digital NL Programme**

The major programme of work for the council, Digital NL, continued at pace to enable staff to work more flexibly supported by an enhanced digital offering.

Service Design
Members will recall the *Digital NL - Year 2 Work Package* report submitted to the Transformation and Digitisation Committee in May 2020. This report detailed the work packages being completed as Year One of the programme came to a close and those scheduled for commencement as part of the Year 2 planning.

Working with services and progressing through virtual teams, the table below provides an update on the current status.

Work package	Status
Waste Solutions	Complete – signed off by Head of Service – moved to build phase.
Employee Service Centre	Complete – working with service to implement internal chatbot and RPA solution.
Fleet	In progress – design stage complete and moving to build phase
Built Environment	In progress – design stage complete and moving to build phase
Environmental Assets	Commenced July 2020 – now in design stage
Health & Social Care and Housing Repairs	Commenced August 2020 – now in design stage

2.5   **Digital Workplace**

The planned roll out of MS365 was accelerated due to the need to change how staff worked as outlined is section 2.2.

The steering group was set up (virtually, in May 2020) and the team of Digital Transformers plus a cohort of early adopters are currently being trained and will provide advice and support to Elected Members and staff across the organisation. Heads of Service attended a bespoke M365 training course in August.

A comprehensive communication and engagement plan is in place to ensure all staff are aware of the changes and learn about the training and support that is available to them via the LearnNL portal. Over 700, 3-5 minute videos are available to support users in the use of the new M365 applications, including Teams, SharePoint and Yammer.

The fast-track roll-out of Microsoft Teams to 200 users is underway with a closed pilot to iron-out teething issues, followed by an open pilot. Numbers will continue to grow as the wider DigitalNL workplace continues its mass migration between now and March 2021. At that point approximately 5000 users will have migrated to MS O365.

2.6 **Intelligent Automation - (Robotic Process Automation "bots")**

During the recovery process a number of requests for the development of "bots" were received to alleviate processing burdens. These are currently being progressed through the Recovery Group and will be prioritised in line with recovery planning assumptions and business objectives.

However, an immediate effort for a bot was actioned to support the processing of all Free School Meals. This has ensured all payments to those qualifying would be paid ahead of the school year commencing as planned on 12 August 2020.

2.7 **Strategic Policy and Governance**

In light of the changes to working arrangements a number of policy and governance changes were implemented.

- Data Protection Impact Assessments were completed for Helping Hands and a Data Sharing Agreement was signed between the council and VANL due to the sensitive nature of data available through channels.
- Further Data Protection Impact Assessments were also completed for the Digital Workplace, Azure Cloud assessment and migration, and Digital Platform design and build, to identify any potential risks in relation to processing personal data and ensure appropriate controls and safeguards were put in place.
- The Digital and IT Strategy was reviewed and updated.
- The Acceptable Use of ICT Policy was updated to reflect emerging conditions.
- Profiles for the nine new Community Boards were developed.

A detailed case was prepared, on behalf of the Head of Environmental Assets, for submission to the Impact and Modelling Group at Scottish Government. Business Solutions built up the case based on research and scientific evidence to address the current social distancing requirements within Public Sector Transport.

The case covered services such as waste collection, grounds maintenance, patient transport for the Scottish Ambulance Service and delivery of services within Scottish Fire and Rescue and Police Scotland. The outcome is awaited.

2.8 **Digital Classroom and Community Hubs**

As the schools closed in mid-March 2020, the council worked with the Scottish Government and Education Scotland to ensure learning continued. Business Solutions provided support to Education and Families to roll out technology requirements utilising Glow, Scotland's national learning platform.

Whilst early work has now been suspended due to the decision to fully reopen schools, as planned on 12 August 2020, the council is in dialogue with BT Open Reach (BT) regarding scope to pilot a 5G enabled immersive classroom experience within the Muirfield Community Centre, Cumbernauld.

This project will be fully funded by BT for 1 year, and any equipment installed as a result of the pilot would remain within the Council's ownership thereafter. This pilot

presents an exciting opportunity to deliver educational content and digital learning and experiences in a completely new manner, and may also present opportunities for alternatives to site visits, such as museums, which would aid the continued response to COVID-19.

From the outset of the pandemic the council's community hubs provided support for the children of key workers, vulnerable children and those with additional support needs.

Following the Scottish Government guidelines, Business Solutions created and implemented an on-line booking system for hub places, assisting 31,645 children to attend the hubs and family learning centres.

2.9 **Support for Businesses**

In early May announcements were made by the Scottish Government on a range of support funds for businesses. Business Solutions staff worked on behalf of Enterprise and Communities to develop online forms for the Self Employed Hardship Fund, the B & B Hardship Fund and the Grant support for small and medium sized businesses, thus allowing applications to be fast-tracked and monies paid, where appropriate, in a timely fashion.

2.10 **Business as Usual**

It should be noted that the detailed response to COVID19 response and recovery is in addition to the work highlighted in the presentation today for the Digital NL programme.

Staff within Business Solutions worked tirelessly to address new challenges, implement solutions and continue with business as usual in over 26 business areas within the COVID-19 Recovery Plan. 27% of business areas achieved productivity of <10% during lockdown; 4% of business areas achieved productivity of between 50% and 80%; and 69% of business areas achieved productivity of between 80% and 100%).

2.11 **Next Steps**

The council's detailed Recovery Planning continues with key support from Business Solutions. Impacts on the phasing of planned work will be addressed when the detailed requirements are known during September 2020. Each activity requiring assistance from Business Solutions, particularly at Levels 1 and 2 of recovery planning will be scored against a set of criteria within Business Solutions to ensure resources are allocated to key priorities. Work plans within the service will thereafter be revised as necessary.

3. **Equality and Diversity**

3.1 **Fairer Scotland Duty**
There are no requirements for an assessment under the Fairer Scotland duty arising from this report. However, members are assured that the Fairer Scotland assessment process will be undertaken as appropriate when designing services for customers, businesses and residents.

3.2 **Equality Impact Assessment**

Specific equality impact assessments will be undertaken by council services, as appropriate, when developing the phased implementation programme.

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4. Implications

4.1 **Financial Impact**

Business Solutions incurred costs of circa. £0.270m in respect of the COVID-19 recovery and response actions illustrated within this report. These costs are reflected within the overall financial position of the council reported on 13 August 2020. Further IT and Digital costs may arise as services deploy their recovery plans. These are not yet quantified, but have been acknowledged within the £5.000m contingency sum identified within the report by the Head of Financial Solutions.

4.2 **HR/Policy/Legislative Impact**

Required changes will be reported through the Finance and Resources Committee.

4.3 **Environmental Impact**

There is no environmental impact arising from this report.

4.4 **Risk Impact**

Risks are managed in line the council's corporate risk management processes.

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5. Measures of success

5.1 There are two key measure of success evidenced in this report:

(1) The extent to which all available technologies were quickly mobilised to facilitate large scale home working. This enabled ongoing delivery of critical services as well as ensuring available resources to support the council's response to the pandemic.
(2) Delivery of the DigitalNL business as usual programme which continued at pace, while simultaneously delivering on new developments to support those most in need in North Lanarkshire's communities, for example those shielding and free school meals vouchers.

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6. Supporting documents

N/A

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