

North Lanarkshire Council

Report

Transformation and Digitisation Committee

approval noting

Ref KH/LJ/FM

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PoW 069 - DigitalNL Communications and Engagement Activity

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Executive Summary

To meet the needs of customers and businesses in an increasingly connected world, North Lanarkshire Council is committed to implementing and expanding our digital service offering through the use of modern and innovative technology.

The ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, is further highlighting the need to digitise council services, to provide online access for customers facing shielding and other health-related mobility restrictions, and protect our employees through providing digital functionality to support remote working.

As a result of the current climate, customer behaviours and preferred interactions have changed and the continued uptake and use of digital services is here to stay.

In order to best serve the people and communities of North Lanarkshire, our online channels and provision must meet and exceed the standards now expected to succeed in the new environment.

This report outlines the progress and future plans in place to accelerate the development of a digital workplace, web-based access to service information and transactions and the use of data and automated intelligence to boost productivity and service operations.

Recommendations

It is recommended the Transformation and Digitisation Committee:

- (1) Note the contents of this report

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

(23) Build a workforce for the future capable of delivering on our priorities and shared ambition

(24) Review and design services around people, communities, and shared resources

1. Background

- 1.1 As the digital programme has developed, additional methods of communication and engagement to inform and involve users in the transformation of services have developed. Members will be aware that this has been the subject of ongoing reports to this committee.
 - 1.2 However, as a result of Covid-19, digital tools and techniques for communications, both internal and external, are now essential and will shape the style and format of messaging to support service delivery changes as a result of new technology and the move towards a digital workplace.
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2. Report

- 2.1. In line with the approved Communication and Engagement Plan a number of planned activities have taken place since the last Committee. The key focus over the period has been the implementation and roll out of the new digital workplace which is detailed below.

Communications Overview - Internal

Digital Workplace

- 2.2 As part of the DigitalNL programme, it is essential that our people are trained and have access to the products and online platforms that will allow us to work in a more collaborative and efficient way.
- 2.3 Developing our digital workplace will be supported by the introduction of Microsoft Office 365 (M365). However, as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, and need to provide staff with remote and agile ways of working, the roll out of this software was accelerated.
- 2.4 The mass migration of staff to M365 is scheduled to take place between September 2020 and March 2021 at the latest. However, to ensure this is successful, it is essential that pilot testing takes place ahead of the wider move. The council's recovery plan will influence the priority levels attached to services as the mass migration gathers pace.

Pilot Testing

- 2.5 The first phase of testing took place in July 2020. During this time, around 30 members of technical staff within Business Solutions were migrated to M365 in order to test and provide feedback on the suite of products available.
- 2.6 This 'test and try' period is ongoing with an expanded Open Pilot currently progressing. This phase comprises a further 200 employees, including staff who support elected members, Digital Transformers, Personal Assistants, HR representatives and those who require assistive technology on work devices. It is anticipated that this phase will be complete by the end of September 2020.
- 2.7 Progress updates are being regularly shared with staff as part of the testing cycle, and when considered successful, the migration plan based on COVID-19 recovery planning will be shared and discussed with service areas.

Equality Impact Assessment – Assisted Technology

- 2.8 As part of the move to M365, a coordinated programme of activity is in place to ensure that employees who use assistive technologies as part of their IT set-up, are not negatively impacted by the roll out.
- 2.9 Working with the council's Equality Officer and partner organisation, Access Technology, a small team of staff with specialist kit installed on devices, were identified to take part in the Open Pilot to test the assistive functionality available from M365 and thereafter advise if these products meet their requirements.
- 2.10 With support from Business Solutions, additional devices, loaded with the necessary M365 products, were provided to staff as part of this testing process, to ensure they did not lose any of the additional software currently installed and used to carry out their role. The practicalities of this and training support required, were discussed ahead of live testing.
- 2.11 To supplement the pilot testing feedback, a short questionnaire was also emailed to all known employees with assistive technology in August, to gain further insight on software used, IT support required and preferred training methods to assist the move to M365.

Training - Workforce Development

- 2.12 Providing readily available access to M365 training is an essential part of the roll out. Our new Digital Learning Platform within learnNL has a dedicated M365 area, offering a learning pathways guide and an extensive range of training videos, modules and materials, to help staff understand and complete courses relevant to core products. Along with gaining new digital skills and capabilities, all training accomplished within this area is recorded as part of learning dashboards associated with employee personal development.
- 2.13 Along with the Training and Organisational Development function, our Digital Transformer network is crucial to encouraging and providing learning guidance to colleagues in a trusted one-to-one or small group format.
- 2.14 As early adopters of M365, it is essential that they have the training and skills necessary to provide the wider support that will be required during mass migration. To help this process, four half-day training sessions took place during August 2020. These were delivered by a M365 specialist associated with our Systems Integrator, Agilisys and are also available to a core group of staff who support the roll out.
- 2.15 To assist with this work, our network of Digital Transformers has expanded from 39 members to 52, with additional involvement being provided within Health and Social Care, Waste Solutions and Legal and Licencing.

Communication activity

- 2.16 Supporting all of this work is a M365 communication activity plan, as it is imperative that staff are informed and engaged throughout the testing and migration process.

A special edition of the DigitalNL newsletter, dedicated to M365, was shared council-wide in early August. This provided an overview of the suite of products, the timeline for introduction and the training opportunities in place to help staff become familiar with everything M365 has to offer.

- 2.17 To help M365 communications become easily identifiable, a new bespoke logo has been created. This is being incorporated in all communication materials and platforms including email footers, newsletters and online banners on Connect and Yammer.
- 2.18 To achieve communication and training goals, a M365 awareness week took place in August and over the course of five-days, product features to enable team collaboration, information access and time-saving document control were promoted, to demonstrate the positive impact M365 will have on daily working lives.
- 2.19 Along with sharing the benefits of M365, communication messages have also focussed on the work staff can do now to prepare for the migration, including removing files, photos, folders and attachments that are no longer required, as we do not want to move out-of-date or non-Business value data to the new platform.
- 2.20 A core communication tool that is available within M365 is Migration Studio. This allows automated messages to be shared with staff at key points in the lead up to their move. These automated messages have been created and are being used as part of the pilot testing programme. As it stands, they will be released 20 days, 10 days, 5 days and the night of the migration to ensure staff are kept informed and aware of the role they need to play. Post migration automated messages are also set and will be part of this process.

Stakeholder Engagement

Yammer Enterprise

- 2.21 Yammer Enterprise forms part of the M365 product suite. However, with many service area staff operating remotely as a result of Covid-19, the tool was made available to everyone in advance of the full migration to allow staff to keep in touch and access key news and information. Maintaining this online community is also part of our contingency planning for health and wellbeing, to ensure staff do not feel isolated and less connected to colleagues as a result of recent workplace changes.
- 2.22 Communications to support the launch of the collaboration tool were shared in June 2020, and although it is very similar to the basic version that staff were familiar with, log in procedures and online tutorial videos were made available to help staff join and start using the upgraded version. In the last two months, over 600 members of staff have been active on the site. Communication messages and channels will be critical to driving further uptake.
- 2.23 An updated Yammer Usage Policy has been circulated and made available on the council's Connect site and a new request process has been put in place to better manage the creation of specialist groups within the platform.

Trade Unions

- 2.24 A regular exchange of information regarding the progress of the DigitalNL Programme takes place with Trade Union Representatives; the latest meeting took place on 16 June.

External Communication - Website Redesign

- 2.25 The council's new website will be launched jointly with the Customer Service Hub in October 2020, the subject of a separate report to this committee. For many residents it will become the digital front door to council services, so we need to ensure the content and navigational structure provides the positive user experience necessary to encourage the online channel shift that is fundamental to the DigitalNL programme.
- 2.26 With the visual structure and Content Management System (CMS) for the new website in place, the focus has been on migrating information pages that are available on the existing website onto the new CMS. To begin the process, 12 training sessions were delivered during June and July to web authors responsible for moving page content onto the site within their service. This time was used to deliver live demonstrations of the CMS and provide coaching on how to apply the new content style guide, to ensure all website copy reflects a consistent tone of voice.
- 2.27 With the training now complete, all Waste Solution pages have been migrated to the CMS and new directory-based content has been added for Area Registration Offices, Cemeteries, Housing Offices, Parks, Recycling Centres and Schools.
- 2.28 At this stage, over 1,000 information pages have been added or updated on the CMS, with a further 300 still to be created.
- 2.29 Ongoing contact and support is being provided to service-based web authors to ensure all page content is migrated to the new CMS by the end of September at the latest. Training guides, video recordings and a private web publishing group on Yammer are being used to help this process.
- 2.30 A user testing programme covering the functionality of the website and customer portal will take place, involving participation from representatives within The Citizen's Panel, Tenant Participation Group, Digital North Lanarkshire, The Disability Access Panel and the North Lanarkshire Youth Council. The timing and practicalities of this work given the current climate is under discussion.

Improving processes - Robotic Process Automation

- 2.31 The DigitalNL team has been working with our business partner, PwC, to identify and utilise intelligent automation to deliver improved services and faster outcomes for residents and businesses across North Lanarkshire.
- 2.32 As members will recall, Robotic Process Automations (RPA) have been introduced within our Revenues team to update Direct Debit payment information and process bank account changes.
- 2.33 However, our desire to make further use of automated technology has continued and made significant progress in recent months. During July and early August 2020, we developed a bot to process Free School Meal and Clothing Grant applications. This enabled us to manage a challenging backlog of requests as a result of high demand and short turnaround timescales due to Covid-19 recovery.

In tandem with manual processing, the bot processed in excess of 3,000 applications to support low income families across North Lanarkshire and issue payments ahead of schools returning as scheduled on 12 August, 2020.

- 2.34 In addition to this, we have developed a bot that will process 5,000 Universal Credit transactions each and every month. Automating these transactions will provide us with an accurate view of resident's Council Tax reduction eligibility and help ensure people get the help they are entitled to.
- 2.35 To follow-on from the success achieved, a bot programmed to order furniture items from our Scottish Welfare Fund Community Care Grant applications, was put into live service, also in August 2020. The bot is projected to place 650 orders per month, and will improve resource capacity within the team.
- 2.36 We are now in the process of building and implementing four new bots to:
- update bereavements on our Council Tax system, making it easier for residents who have suffered the loss of a family member, manage personal affairs
 - Update Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) ATLAS records on our Council Tax & Housing Benefit system
 - Process 23,000 rent arrear transactions on a monthly basis. This automated provision will help the team focus on collecting rental income and support those who may be at risk of falling into arrears
 - Update customer rent arrear profiles with Universal Credit payment arrangement information, to ensure our Housing Services Management System (HSMS) has an accurate view of the DWP Universal Credit payments made to residents. This bot is projected to process 8,000 transactions per month.
- 2.37 The next phase of RPA development is underway and the team is working with staff in Waste Solutions, Employee Service Centre, Built Environment and Health and Social Care, to identify processes that could be enhanced through the use of automated intelligence.
- 2.38 With this widened range of automated processes now tested and being introduced into service, internal and external communications will be shared throughout the remainder of 2020, to demonstrate the council's commitment to adopting innovative and sector-leading technology to deliver more effective working practices and better customer experience.

Youth Engagement

- 2.39 The council recognises that young people have a crucial role to play in terms of promoting digital engagement within our communities. They generally possess high levels of digital awareness and abilities and are therefore well placed to provide informal support to family members. In addition, given that they will in turn become North Lanarkshire's future employees and householders, it is important that we engage with them.
- 2.40 The Digital Skills and Inclusion Working Group includes twin commitments to 'build digital skills and capabilities in our children and young people' and 'deliver digitally enhanced learning environments', whilst at the same time, 'enabling a modern workforce who embrace a culture of innovation and change.'

- 2.41 To this end, joint work will take place with Community Learning and Development to engage directly with young people and involve them in user testing - for example, the introduction of the council's new website, and the development of specific projects. It is important to ensure that the benefits of our digital transformation are inclusive and planning is now underway to explore where our digital business partners, Agilisys and PwC, can support digital training and awareness raising as part of their community benefit commitments.
- 2.42 An early outcome will include their direct involvement in the Winter Leavers' Programme, which includes care experienced young people and young people with multiple barriers to learning.

Modern Apprentice

- 2.43 The DigitalNL team has always been proactive in supporting and providing young people with the opportunity to gain the skills, confidence and experience required to be successful in the workplace. In October 2019, we welcomed our second Modern Apprentice to the programme and over the last 10 months, he has worked on projects relating to our communications, service redesign and M365 functions and has been a valuable resource within the team.
- 2.44 As a result of the experience gained, he has recently secured a Graduate Apprenticeship within Building Standards, which is a positive outcome for all involved. The transition to this service area is underway and demonstrates the powerful impact North Lanarkshire Council's Apprenticeship Programme can have on shaping and providing career paths for young people within our communities.

Next Steps

- Support the introduction and move to M365
- Complete the content page migration to the new CMS
- Agree actions for website user testing, incorporating customer portal feedback
- Share ongoing communication content regarding RPA and digital process introductions as a result of service redesign sprints

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 should be 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

This report outlines the Equality Impact Assessment process that is being undertaken by the council in relation to the introduction of Microsoft Office 365.

4. Implications

4.1 Financial Impact

As previously reported a £10k communications budget for 2020/21 has been agreed and all future spend will be reported within the wider DigitalNL financial plan. As it stands, minor spend has been recorded in relation to the development of the internal branding for M365. This work was produced by the council's in-house graphics team.

4.2 HR/Policy/Legislative Impact

There will be changes to some employee roles as a result of the DigitalNL programme. The DigitalNL team continues to collaborate with the People and Organisational Development (POD) Team regarding early stakeholder engagement and consultation, as these are key to the successful implementation and delivery of the HR related aspects of this iterative transformation programme.

4.3 Environmental Impact

Providing digital services that offer online, anytime access to services will have a positive environmental impact across a number of important areas such as minimising waste and recycling, thanks to the limited need for paper forms.

The development of a digital workforce will again reduce the council's carbon footprint by saving energy and reducing emissions, as a result of decreased work-related travel and need for buildings to remain open.

This will in turn support the Council's Carbon Management Plan.

4.4 Risk Impact

Effective identification and management of risk is considered critical to the success of this programme. A comprehensive risk assessment and Risk and Issue Log (RAIDE) is being managed and monitored throughout the programme with high-level risks and all programme level issues being reported to the SRO and Delivery Board on a monthly basis. Due to the Covid-19 emergency, individual risk assessments will be completed for each individual project, to identify any potential risks and develop suitable mitigation and control measures.

5. Measures of success

5.1 Success will be evidenced through improved productivity and staff engagement due to a growing digital working culture enabled through the use of products and platforms available within M365.

5.2 Increased digital customer interactions as a result of accurate and easy to find web-based information and through providing residents with the opportunity to carry out end-to-end online requests and transactions for specific service areas.

5.3 Improved service delivery and customer satisfaction levels as a result of automated processes and increased staff capacity to support vulnerable residents.

6. Supporting Documents

Appendix 1 – Communication and Engagement Roadmap

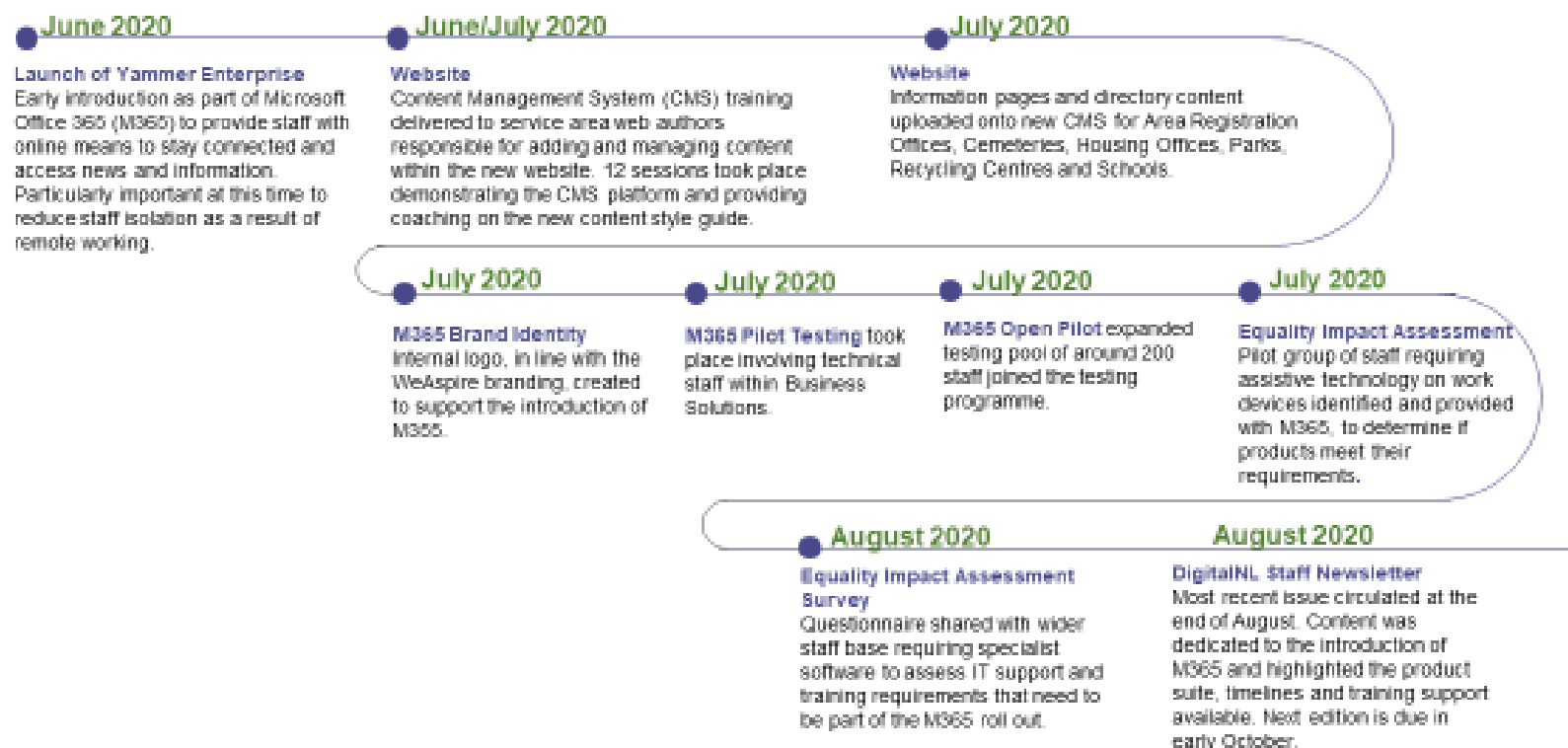
A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Katrina M Hassell". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial 'K'.

Katrina M Hassell
Head of Business Solutions (Chief Executive Service)



Communications and Engagement activity

The roadmap below highlights communication and engagement activity completed and scheduled during June – September 2020.



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