

<b>Item No.</b> 12.	<b>Classification:</b> Open	<b>Date:</b> 6 March 2024	<b>Meeting Name:</b> Cabinet
<b>Report title:</b>		Technology and Digital Strategy 2024-2026	
<b>Ward(s) or groups affected:</b>		All	
<b>Cabinet Member:</b>		Councillor Stephanie Cryan, Communities, Democracy and Finance	

**FOREWORD - COUNCILLOR STEPHANIE CRYAN, CABINET MEMBER FOR COMMUNITIES, DEMOCRACY AND FINANCE**

Our priority is to improve the services and opportunities we offer to the people of Southwark. Digital needs to be at the front and centre of how we achieve this.

Continually improving how we manage our technology and digital services is crucial if we are to respond to local needs, operate with reduced budgets, and keep up with changes in the technology world.

The Technology and Digital Strategy provides a clear plan for how we can build responsive Digital Services that meets the requirements of our residents.

Together with Southwark 2030 and the Council plan, this strategy will help us to create a Well-Run Council to support our staff in accessing modern workplace technology and providing the skills to enable them to deliver services as efficiently as possible. Ensuring that our services remain focused on user requirements and that we make the required investment in technology to keep our services accessible and secure.

We are continually working to understand the digital accessibility needs of residents in Southwark. Our overall vision follows the Greater London Authority (GLA)'s Digital Access Mission which is for "Every Southwark resident to have access to a fast and stable internet connection, a device and the skills needed to participate in society and the digital economy by 2025".

The Technology and Digital Strategy 2024-26 sets out our ambitions for Southwark and is underpinned by our Technology and Digital Pillars.

As more of our residents move online, others still need support and we will ensure they are not left behind by providing digital hubs and support in libraries and voluntary organisations.

We will continue to work collaboratively with our cross-sector partners including academia, charities, and grassroots organisations. This is central to our work in supporting our residents. The plans underpinning this strategy will ensure residents are at the centre of what we do.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Recommendation for the Cabinet**

1. That the draft refreshed Technology and Digital Strategy 2024-2026, as attached as Appendix 1, be agreed.

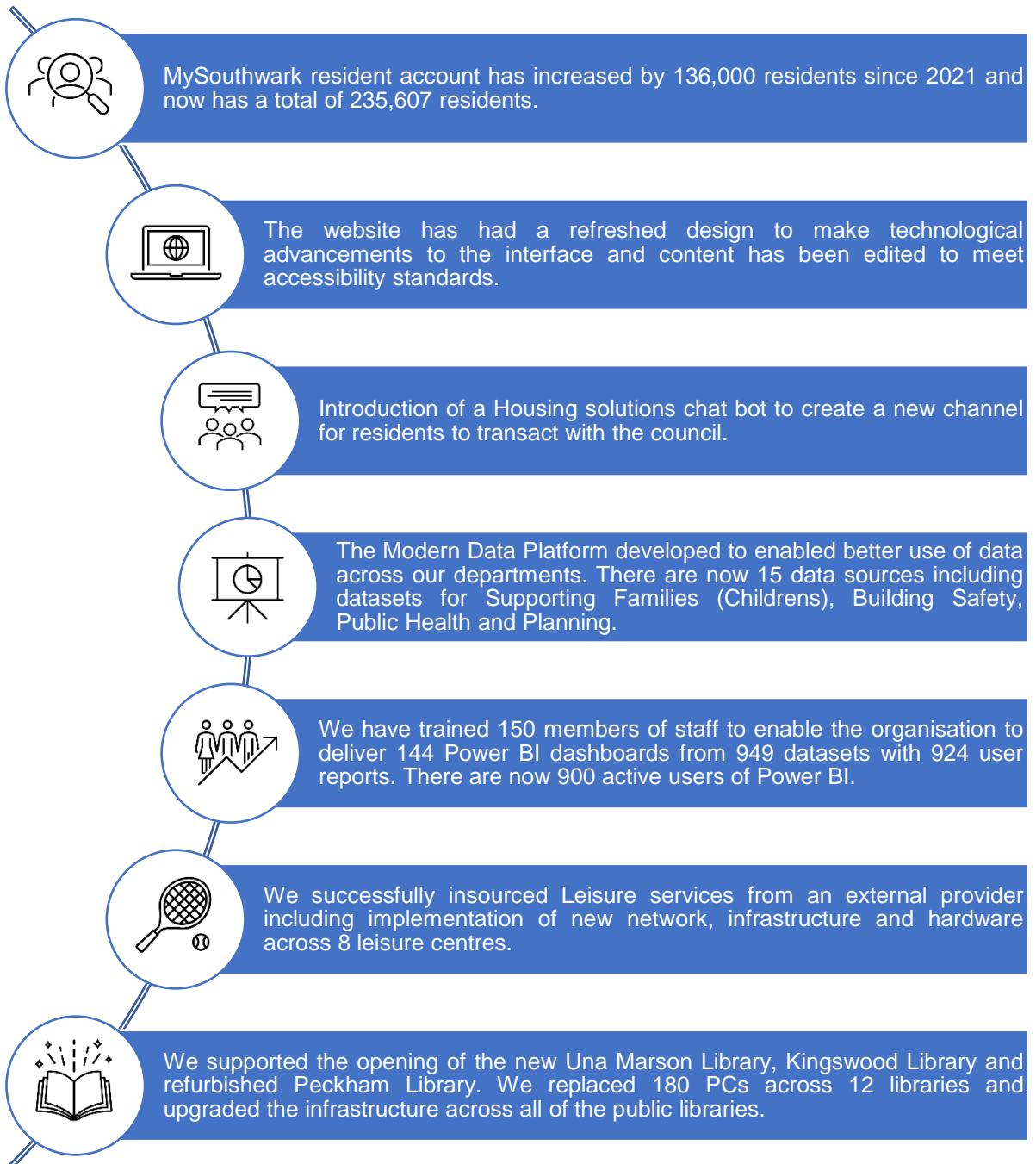
### **Recommendation for the Leader of the Council**

2. The leader of the council delegates authority to the Cabinet Member for Communities, Democracy and Finance to agree to the final strategy and publish in April 2024.

## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

3. Southwark's Technology and Digital Inclusion Strategy was agreed by Cabinet in January 2022, as part of the council's strategies. The strategy focused on the fundamental keystones for transforming the council through digital technologies.
4. The digital strategy set out 5 related areas to support delivery of the council's plan. These areas were:
  - Making Southwark one of the best-connected boroughs in London and developing emerging technology
  - Tackling digital exclusion and supporting residents with digital skills, connectivity and devices
  - Empowering local businesses
  - Improving resident experiences
  - Supporting our staff
5. Although our digital pillars remain relevant, since the digital inclusion strategy was agreed in 2022 and progress has been made against these deliverables, a change in leadership and priorities have meant that a new strategy and areas of focus is required.

6. Keys areas of delivery from the Technology and Digital Inclusion Strategy 2022 – 2025:



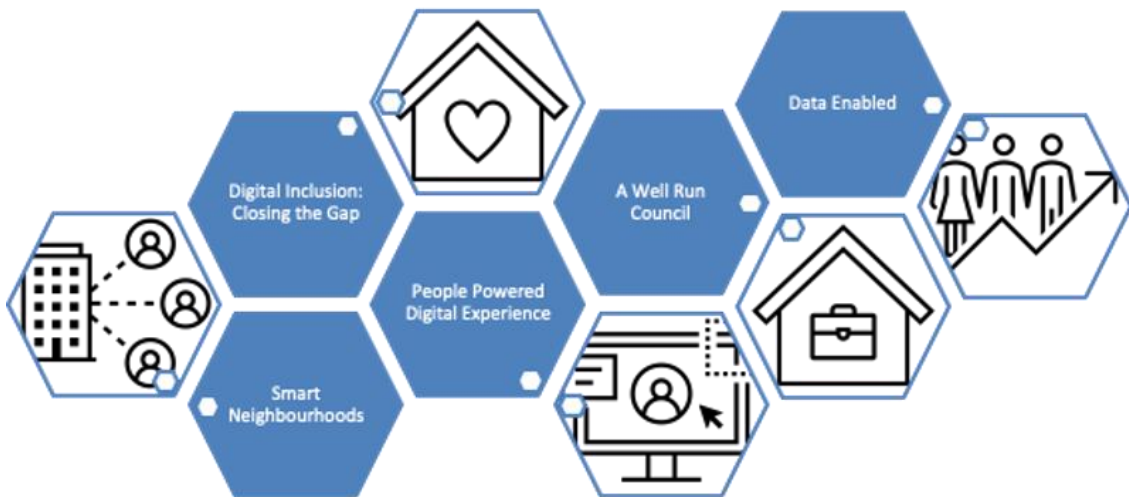
7. This strategy refresh is based on us having a clear understanding of our technology and service needs, considering the drivers for change.

8. Delivering this strategy will provide our workforce with the support required to deliver the council’s priority outcomes and to make sure that we remain future focused.

## Refreshed Technology and Digital Pillars

9. In our refreshed Technology and Digital Strategy, it is proposed to refresh the pillars, to ensure they are relevant and understandable to all audiences. The new descriptions for each pillar are set out as follows:
10. **Smart Neighbourhoods:** We are committed to making Southwark one of the best-connected boroughs in London by using emerging technology. We aim to understand how technology can be used to empower our residents, businesses, and staff to become digital-first and innovating using IoT and Smart City Technologies to help monitor and improve our borough environment. We will work with partners and learn from best practice.
11. **People Powered Digital Experience:** Our aim is to improve user experience, by reviewing how we deliver services to allow residents who choose to self-serve to have a seamless digital interaction with us. We want to create a single front door for Southwark residents with a single sign on experience where possible.
12. **Digital Inclusion Closing the Gap:** We are tackling digital exclusion and ensuring our residents have the tools, skills, and technology they need. We are providing fast, reliable internet availability throughout the Borough, and the skills to enable our residents to use digital technologies.
13. **A Well-Run Council:** We are establishing a centralised hub for Technology and Digital within our organisation to assist our staff in utilising modern workplace technology and acquiring the necessary skills to enhance service delivery efficiency. This will help us be more responsive to resident needs and provide the organisation with additional capacity to serve the residents of Southwark. This involves a commitment to aligning our services with user requirements, making essential investments in technology to ensure accessibility and security. By fostering a digital culture and embracing innovative work methodologies, we aim to meet the evolving needs of our residents while empowering our staff to adapt to new ways of working.

14. **Data Enabled:** Prioritising the utilisation of data and insights for understanding the requirements of our communities and establishing a single resident view is a priority. We are building appropriate governance structures to facilitate the internal sharing of data and insights within the organisation, as well as with external partners. This includes the provision of tools to enhance the effective management of service areas. Additionally, we are in the process of developing open data initiatives on our website to promote the transparency and sharing of information. By utilising and harnessing the data we hold we can better understand the needs of our residents and provide them with better services.



## KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

15. The Cabinet Member for Communities, Democracy and Finance, the Strategic Director of Finance and the Chief Digital and Technology Officer are leading on the digital and technology transformation for the organisation.
16. The Technology and Digital Services Team will coordinate organisation wide technology transformation, whilst providing support and expertise to designing and improving digital services, ensuring efficiency savings are achieved and resident experiences improved.
17. This revised Technology and Digital strategy aims to establish the critical components necessary to ensure that staff can effectively execute the corporate plans and priorities for our borough and collaborate as one council.

18. Technology and Digital Services have created draft guidance for the acceptable and ethical usage of Generative Artificial Intelligence, Robotic Process Automation, and AI. This is being developed to become a formal document and will be brought in line with the acceptable usage policies in the near future.

### **Cyber Security**

19. We are committed to ensure that our systems and data are secure, and that we maintain strong relationships with partners to achieve this.
20. Cyber Security forms a key aspect within the Technology and Digital Strategy.

### **Policy framework implications**

21. Details of the Technology and Digital Strategy's alignment and implications with other policies, frameworks and strategies can be found within the Digital Strategy.

### **Community, equalities (including socio-economic) and health impacts**

#### **Community impact statement**

22. The Equality Act 2010 requires public authorities to have due regard to a number of equality considerations when exercising their function. This process may be informed by an equality analysis.
23. Pursuant to section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 Southwark Council has a duty to have due regard in its decision-making processes to the need to:
  - a) Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation or other prohibited conduct.
  - b) Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not.
  - c) Foster good relations between those who share a relevant characteristic and those that do not share it.
24. The relevant protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation. The Public Section Equality Duty also applies to marriage and civil partnership but only in relation to (a) above.
25. The proposal to refresh the Technology and Digital Strategy will not negatively impact service users of Southwark Council with protected characteristics because there is no proposed reduction or restriction of the scope of the Services that are already being offered to them. The Equality and Health Impact Assessment is set out at Appendix 2.

### **Climate change implications**

26. As part of our commitment to environmental sustainability, our digital strategy is designed to align with the principles of responsible and eco-conscious technology management.
27. Our digital initiatives prioritise energy efficiency, emphasising the adoption of green IT practices such as Cloud utilisation, and reduction of printing.
28. We recognise the role of remote work and digital collaboration in reducing the need for physical travel, thereby contributing to lower carbon emissions.
29. Our technology and digital strategy also emphasises responsible product lifecycle management, considering the environmental impact of our technology choices from procurement to end-of-life. We are committed to minimising electronic waste through recycling programmes within the local area.

### **Resource implications**

30. All the required resources to deliver the identified deliverables in the strategy have been included in the General Fund Capital Programme in addition the remainder of the IT investment programme, which covers smart working and Analogue to Digital Telephone / Network Switchover. Each project and/or initiative that is created outside of this this strategy will seek its own business case and approval process.
31. As part of this refreshed Technology and Digital Strategy 2024-2026 each project and/or initiative that is created because of this strategy will seek its own business case and approval process.

### **Consultation**

32. In developing this refreshed strategy, we have worked with our residents to ensure this meets their needs and ensures we are delivering on the priorities of and for Southwark. We engaged a local partner, Comuzi, to undertake some research into the services received and to see where improvements can be made. We also conducted a questionnaire on our consultations hub where we obtained the opinion of over 100 residents on what Digital means to them and our digital services.
33. Residents told us that in this refreshed strategy, it should not be purely a technology upgrade, but a commitment to inclusivity, accessibility, and user empowerment.
34. Senior Leaders and the Technology and Digital Services Team were also consulted on the strategy through several workshops.

## **Pillar alignment to consultation response**

### **Smart Neighbourhoods**

*Resident feedback:*

35. Residents across Southwark reported persistent issues with connectivity, creating hurdles in accessing essential digital services. Inconsistencies in network strength led to frustration, highlighting a crucial pain point affecting diverse demographics.

*Strategy response:*

36. To tackle this challenge, the digital strategy refresh prioritises establishing smart Wi-Fi zones and optimising network infrastructure. By creating a connected environment, we address the identified pain point and pave the way for residents to interact with digital services seamlessly.

### **People-Powered Digital Experience**

*Resident feedback:*

37. Participants voiced concerns about the incomprehensibility and unmanageable nature of planning entries. Delays in online query responses were also frustrating, underscoring the need for a seamless digital interaction.

*Strategy response:*

38. The Digital Strategy sets out how we will be creating a unified front door through digital channels, community hubs, and contact centres. We will undertake improvements in planning entries and responsiveness to enhance the overall digital experience.

### **Digital Inclusion Closing the Gap**

*Resident feedback:*

39. Challenges in digital inclusion were evident, with inferior connectivity hindering residents' ability to participate in a digitally driven society. Visually impaired participants faced unique challenges in using online services.

*Strategy response:*

40. To address digital exclusion, the strategy sets out how we will continue to develop fast, reliable internet availability throughout the borough and specialised training sessions for residents. The strategy sets out how digital services will be fully compliant with accessibility legislation and guideline.



## **A Well-Run Council**

### *Resident feedback:*

41. Participants expressed frustration over website clutter, making it challenging to find information. The absence of a telephone option for reporting and arranging repairs was also highlighted.

### *Strategy response:*

42. Plans for a user-friendly website interface are detailed in the strategy. Including multi-channel options for problem reporting to enhance accessibility and address the concerns raised.

## **Data Enabled**

### *Resident feedback:*

43. Concerns were raised about data governance and sharing within the organisation. Suggestions included developing open data on the website to encourage information sharing.

### *Strategy response:*

44. The strategy details how we address data governance issues and create open data initiatives on the website can strengthen collaboration and improve residents' lives.
45. As we continue our digital consultation journey, we recognise the importance of fostering a truly inclusive and diverse dialogue. We acknowledge that our current consultation may not have fully captured the rich perspectives of our diverse communities in Southwark. Moving forward, we are continuing to work with Comuzi and existing networks to actively seek and amplify the voices of underrepresented groups.

## **SUPPLEMENTARY ADVICE FROM OTHER OFFICER**

### **Strategic Director of Finance (FIN23/44)**

46. As the Strategic Director of Finance, I am pleased to articulate our vision to create an inclusive digital strategy that reflects our commitment to enhancing the lives of our residents and our dedication to harnessing technology to address the evolving needs of our diverse population.
47. The Technology and Digital Strategy's ambition is to ensure that Southwark is recognised as one of the leading digital boroughs in London. A borough that delivers a digitally inclusive society by developing the digital infrastructure and services that enable its residents, communities and businesses to thrive.
48. Technology will continue to play an essential enabling role in supporting the future aims of both the borough and the council. By providing the necessary tools, skills, and infrastructure, we envision a Southwark where every resident can actively engage in the digital landscape and benefit from the positive impacts of technology.
49. At the heart of our strategy is a commitment to collaboration. We recognise the power of partnerships and engagement with our local community, businesses, and public services. By fostering these collaborations, we seek to co-create innovative solutions that address the unique challenges and opportunities within Southwark. Through this collective effort, we aim to build a digital ecosystem that truly serves the needs of our residents.
50. Transparency and accountability are paramount in our approach. As we embark on this transformative journey, we will keep our stakeholders informed about our progress, challenges, and successes. We invite open dialogue and feedback, understanding that community engagement is an invaluable resource in shaping the digital future of Southwark.

**Assistant Chief Executive, Governance and Assurance (SF20240222)**

- 51. The Assistant Chief Executive, Governance and Assurance notes that the report asks cabinet to agree the draft Technology and Digital Strategy as set out at Appendix 1 of the report.
- 52. The report also recommends that the Leader of the council delegates authority to the Cabinet Member for Communities, Democracy and Finance to agree to the final strategy and publish in April 2024.
- 53. The cabinet is delegated to make this decision in accordance with part 3B of the council’s constitution.
- 54. The cabinet is reminded of the public sector equality duty (PSED) under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 as set out in the community impact statement paragraphs above.
- 55. It is noted that consideration of the need to tackle digital inclusion for all residents of Southwark is a specific strand of the policy going forward and cabinet will need to consider the extent to which this, and the strategy as a whole, will impact any individuals who have protected characteristics. An equality impact assessment has been produced which the cabinet should consider when making this decision. The PSED general duty is a continuing one and will need to be given due regard in the ongoing work plans of the strategy. The Equality and Health Impact Assessment is set out at Appendix 2.
- 56. Whilst there is no requirement to consult the public on the production of this strategy, the report identifies resident engagement that has been undertaken to obtain external views and how these have been taken into account.

**BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

Background papers	Held At	Contact
<p><b>Link:</b>  <a href="#">Technology and Digital Inclusion Strategy 2022 - 2025</a></p>	<p>Council offices                      160 Tooley Street                      London SE1 2QH</p>	<p><a href="mailto:Dionne.lowndes@southwark.gov.uk">Dionne.lowndes@southwark.gov.uk</a></p>

**APPENDICES**

<b>No.</b>	<b>Title</b>
Appendix 1	Southwark Technology and Digital Strategy 2024 – 2026
Appendix 2	Equality and health impact assessment Technology and Digital Strategy 2024-2026

**AUDIT TRAIL**

<b>Cabinet Member</b>	Cllr Stephanie Cryan, Communities, Democracy and Finance	
<b>Lead Officer</b>	Clive Palfreyman, Strategic Director of Finance	
<b>Report Author</b>	Dionne Lowndes, Chief Digital and Technology Officer	
<b>Version</b>	Final	
<b>Dated</b>	22 February 2024	
<b>Key Decision?</b>	Yes	
<b>CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / CABINET MEMBER</b>		
<b>Officer Title</b>	<b>Comments Sought</b>	<b>Comments Included</b>
Strategic Director of Finance	Yes	Yes
Assistant Chief Executive Assurance and Governance	Yes	Yes
Strategic Policy Board	Yes	Yes
Corporate Management Team	Yes	Yes
<b>Cabinet Member</b>	Yes	Yes
<b>Date final report sent to Constitutional Team</b>		22 February 2024