

## IT STRATEGY 2019-21

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

Effective IT Services play a vital role in supporting and enabling organisations achieve their business goals, especially as this focus turns even further to digital service delivery. When appropriately deployed, IT enables processes to operate in a consistent and efficient manner resulting in an improved end user experience.

To support this objective, Stockport Homes has continuously invested in its IT Services to take advantage of both technology and application enhancements. In developing this Strategy, the goals and ambitions within SHG Business Plan and SHG Service Improvement Plan 2019/20 have been considered to ensure the IT Service enables those ambitions to be achieved and implemented. This has also included a review of other service specific business and delivery plan including the Threesixty Business Plan and the aspirations for Foundations Stockport.

## 2 CONTEXT

### 2.1 IT Drivers and Trends

IT continuously evolve to both meet business and consumer demands, as well as shape those demands. The development of cloud computing has reached a level of maturity whereby this has become the default solution for many private and public organisations. The housing sector, hindered in part by legacy software solutions is only now realising the potential that cloud can offer.

The introduction of modern application suites like Microsoft Office 365, alongside scalable technology platforms from Amazon, Google and Microsoft are set to transform how IT applications can be supplied and consumed. Having access to these applications 24/7 relies upon a robust connectivity infrastructure, which will be further enhanced by the future rollout of 5G mobile connectivity. This will offer the potential for ultra-high speed communications, usher in autonomous transport options as well as support the practical application of multiple connected technologies – the internet of things (IoT). The housing sector are only just beginning to tap into these potential opportunities and it is likely to be several years before 5G and full scale IoT will be a mainstream objective.

As technology becomes more advanced and connected, there are challenges in ensuring how the sheer amount of data that will be generated can be understood, stored and appropriately governed. To do this well will require a shift in approach as well as embracing new skills like data science.

### 2.2 SHG Context

The IT Service now supports over 640 users across multiple working environments using a variety of technologies and systems. The introduction of WorkSmart <sup>1</sup> in 2017

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<sup>1</sup> <sup>1</sup>WorkSmart. A far reaching business change initiative that explores and transform how the organisation will deliver results. This will be done by blending the right communication tools, the technology that is in use, effective staff engagement, flexibility in how work is carried out and the environment in which we carry this out.

provided both the opportunity for flexible working together with demand for better systems to more effectively support customers. At the same time there has been significant growth in the number of users and systems that need to be supported.

The move to a Group structure, with increased emphasis on commercial opportunities, has highlighted the need to be flexible in how systems are configured and offer agility in IT service provision. Some of the technologies currently in use restrict this objective, and the actions within the Strategy set out to address them.

This Strategy has close links to the following corporate strategies.

#### Customer Access Strategy

This includes specific actions around how customers access services, whether face to face, via the web or over the phone. IT Services need to be able to support these interactions and present the right information to users irrespective of service channel or time of day. IT solutions will be designed with a 'mobile first' approach to reflect current market trends.

#### People & OD Strategy

This includes specific actions around staff recruitment, retention and personal development. The adoption of flexible working, together with use of modern IT systems including Office 365 are valued by employees and can increase overall job satisfaction.

The joined up use of social tools like Facebook and LinkedIn can help identify and attract new talent to the Group. Introducing automation in the on-boarding process can improve the make the overall user experience. Using reporting insight and artificial intelligence will help surface information, make predictions and assist with decision making.

The introduction of streamlined processes and automated systems could have some far reaching impact upon job roles and responsibilities in the future. It is important to consider these impacts and make appropriate adjustments inaction plans

#### Marketing and Communications Strategy

This includes specific actions around how the Group communicates with its customers and staff (including the use of Social Media and websites) and that an appropriate platform can identify, collect and process information to suit all audiences.

#### Asset Management Strategy

This includes specific actions around the collection, update and use of asset data and how this data can be used to plan and deliver the development and capital programmes. Deploying integrated systems and automating processes will improve the way information is held and reduce the need for data rekeying. This will assist the

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way data flows between different systems and teams and will improve forecasting, with an increase in VFM as a result.

The effective deployment of smart technology within homes (e.g. sensors, boilers etc.), will increase knowledge about the housing stock, and help understand any environmental and health impact.

## 2.3 The IT Service

The IT Service currently has two specific IT teams, Service Delivery and Systems supported by dedicated Business analysts. These teams complement SMBC activities that included as part of the existing Service Level Agreement (SLA), which itself is regularly reviewed to meet changing objectives and improving performance standards. The specific activities that are performed by each team and SMBC are detailed below.

### Service Delivery

This team provide front line day to day service to Group users including hardware and end user support to all 640 users. It provides induction IT training for new starters across the Group and consists of five members of staff.

### Systems Team

This team manage the day to day operations and upgrades of key systems including Housing Management, Repairs, CRM and Asset Management and consists of five members of staff. They will be instrumental in the successful delivery of a modern housing management system.

### Business Analyst Team

A Business Analyst Team, consisting of four posts currently undertake a business process redesign service across the company. The team is used when new IT systems or improvements are being introduced and act as liaison between the IT service and its customers. The procurement and deployment of a modern Housing Management system will place additional demands upon this team. A full cost benefit will be prepared around any extra resources to support this initiative.

### Relationship with Stockport Council

Stockport Council provide under a Service Level Agreement (SLA) the following services:

- Resilient Local and wide area network provision
- Data centre and hosting services for Group applications
- Desktop services including Microsoft Office and Hardware configuration
- Telephony services including contact centre, desktop and mobile contract provision

- Corporate finance application ( SAP) provision and support, plus dedicated database support for Northgate , the current housing management system

The relationship is managed on an on-going basis through regular management meetings where, performance against defined targets are reported and any non-performance addressed. Performance is currently above target and the main focus at the meetings is to address change requests that can take longer to implement.

### 3 STRATEGIC VISION

The delivery of this Strategy supports Stockport Homes Group Aims, with particular emphasis upon these three

#### Maximise efficiency

A considerable proportion of the annual IT budget is spent on software support and maintenance costs to a variety of suppliers. The procurement of a modern housing management system will reduce the need for multiple systems, supplies and contracts resulting in considerable long term savings. These realised savings can then be use to enable further IT improvements across the Group.

#### Be a great place to work

Having systems that work effectively wherever work is carried out reduces the need for workarounds. When supported by appropriate process design and end user training, less time will be spent on non-value activities and more being able to deliver great services. This should improve satisfaction with end users as well the teams within the IT Service.

#### Be accountable to customers

Customers expect technology to enable excellent service delivery and not be seen to “get in the way”. The introduction of a modern housing management system will involve customers as part of the design and configuration so that the finished product and the services that it can support more accurately meets the needs of all customers.

In order to deliver against the SHG Aims, the Strategic Vision for the IT Service is:

**To be a customer driven service, supporting SHG to achieve its business goals and ambitions by deploying the right technology, whilst delivering VFM.**

In terms of what this looks like in the future, it will mean:

- Customers and staff being delighted in a range of effective services that result in rapid fulfilment for customer demands. This should include any service redesign needed to help support the deployment of a modern housing management system that offer a wide and increasing range of online services.
- In time this online offer is expected to be the “go-to” option for many customers, which in turn will allow staff to be freed up to support those customers less able to make use of use these channels

- The supporting IT infrastructure just “works” whilst keeping all data secure irrespective of what corporate devices are used.
- Corporate data is easy to find, consolidated across multiple systems, secure and trusted. Users spent less time searching for customer or property information and are able to make better judgments based upon accurate information in a timely manner. This data quality improvement will also support any data sharing requirements flowing from Greater Manchester’s Devolution activities.
- IT Support requests provide a consistent experience to all staff with rapid issue resolution, so that users can continue with minimal interruptions.
- Users are confident with their use of IT and have suitable support.

## **4 STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES**

There are six overarching strategic objectives in this Strategy for 2019-21, each of which has associated actions and timelines to ensure delivery. The actions within a single objective are complementary and in some cases dependent upon the completion of actions in other objectives, so should be viewed holistically. Together these objectives will result in IT services that meet business demands as well as operational sustainability.

These objectives are:

- Supporting Digital Transformation
- Maximising IT skills and support users in effective use of IT systems
- Maximising Service Delivery
- Securing the IT infrastructure
- Maximising value from Data
- Deliver modern applications

## 5 OBJECTIVE 1: SUPPORT DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

The SHG Digital Transformation vision will encompass a number of specific activities and projects that extend beyond core IT services. It is important to ensure that IT strategic objectives are aligned to this digital transformation. The delivery of each of the proceeding objectives will have an associated positive impact on staff, customers and processes and provide the right foundation to deliver agreed outcomes.

Activities identified range from improving online services with mobile friendly solutions, analysis and automation of business processes that improve efficiencies such as paper reduction and improving staff and customer overall digital skills to take advantage of new opportunities. Emerging technologies such as the application Artificial intelligence and 5G will be fully assessed within this objective.

**Action 6.1)** Deliver agreed IT actions flowing from SHG Digital Transformation vision. The resources needed and delivery timescales will need to be assessed alongside other agreed projects.

### Outcomes

Improved staff and customer satisfaction. Increase in operational effectiveness and efficiency.

## 6 OBJECTIVE 2: MAXIMISING IT SKILLS AND SUPPORT USERS IN EFFECTIVE USE OF IT SYSTEMS

This objective both covers resources with the IT Service as well as end users across SHG. Over the last 12 months, analysis has taken place which has identified an inconsistency of approach to learning and development and how various technologies and systems are used. This undermines the value of recent IT investments and can limit future opportunities.

The actions within this objective set out to improve the overall IT skills across the group, including identifying and addressing current skills and capacity gaps within the IT service. Initially these are data management and business intelligence, which will be addressed to ensure the successful delivery of other strategic objectives, including maximising value from data. Other skill gaps may be identified from actions emerging from the digital agenda and the outcomes following the procurement of a modern housing management solution, so flexibility and adaptability is essential.

**Action 2.1):** Undertake a skills and capacity assessment for the IT Service based upon known and likely activities. Address any identified gaps to meet operational need.

**Action 2.2):** Design and introduce a digital skills assessment for new and existing staff, complimented by an appropriate IT skills pathway with suitable content to improve overall IT awareness.

## Outcomes

All staff are able to effectively use corporate supplied IT equipment, and be confident in managing personal and corporate data.

## **7 OBJECTIVE 3: MAXIMISING SERVICE DELIVERY**

The IT Service needs to continue to adapt to meet the needs of the Group. This objective recognises there are a range of individual actions that have an overall impact ensuring excellence of service delivery is achieved. This includes continuing to work with Stockport Council ICT Service on improving their overall service to the Group, as well as ensuring improvements in service quality and reduced delivery times.

**Action 3.1)** Continue to work with Stockport Council ICT to improve overall IT services through enhanced Service Level arrangements. Ensuring the strategic objectives of the two organisations are kept aligned and actions arising are delivered to agreed timescales.

**Action 3.2)** Review and reposition IT service operations after the successful deployment of a modern Housing Management solution (see Objective 5) to maximise service flexibility

**Action 3.3)** Undertake a detailed analysis of operational technology requirements by job role types so that users have access to a wide range of desktop and mobile equipment that meets operational needs.

## Outcomes

IT Services, equipment and resources meet current and future needs. Customer service improves following more effective use of technology.

## **8 OBJECTIVE 4: SECURING THE INFRASTRUCTURE**

Time and resources need to be invested to ensure the IT network remains fit for purpose, flexible to meet changing needs, resilient to withstand external threats and secure at all times. The expansion of cloud services from multiple providers introduce additional technical dimensions that need resources, skills and contract supplier.

**Action 4.1)** Ensure the network including internet access has both capacity and resilience to meet needs taking into growth in Cloud services.

**Action 4.2)** Ensure all IT users are aware and routinely reminded of their cybersecurity responsibilities and that IT systems are enhanced to further limit the potential for data loss or breaches.

**Action 4.3)** Ensure public internet access connectivity in agreed locations meets expectations.

## Outcomes

Improved customer service, minimise the risk of a data security breaches, and increased confidence that systems are resilient.

## 9 OBJECTIVE 5: MAXIMISING VALUE FROM DATA

SHG have the ability to extract valuable insight from transactional data from existing systems. Data management is becoming increasingly important and complicated and there is a need to improve the way data is stored, retrieved and deleted.

**Action 5.1)** Develop data quality assessment and assign owners to agreed processes to improve data quality. This will likely need to flow from processes that are migrated as part of the procurement of the modern housing management system.

**Action 5.2)** Design, build and populate a data warehouse to meet agreed business data needs. The best time for this construction will be as part of the build of the modern housing management system to reduce unnecessary rework.

**Action 5.3)** To optimise the corporate use of Business Intelligence (BI) from data held across SHG, which will explore the need for a corporate BI team.

### Outcomes

There is a single source of trusted data to support system operations and business insight and reporting is simplified and timely.

## 10 OBJECTIVE 6: DELIVER MODERN APPLICATIONS

IT software in use is able to fully meet current and future operational needs. Currently SHG use in excess of 20 main and peripheral systems with differing degrees of interrelation. The aim is to both reduce the number of systems in use as well as improve system integration to improve the information that flows between each of them.

The most significant task within this objective is to re-procure a new housing management system. The current system, Northgate, was originally procured in 2000 and since then its functionality has needed to be supplemented with other systems to meet changing needs. The procurement and implementation of a modern housing management will encompass a much wider range of functionality and will have a direct impact on what other systems need to be retained or decommissioned.

**Action 6.1)** Successfully deploy Office 365 including OneDrive & SharePoint for network resources and internal communication. Develop suitable roadmap for SHG use of additional specific applications, including Teams and Flow.

**Action 6.2)** Procure and deploy a modern Housing Management system to provide long term ability, flexibility and resilience.

**Action 6.3)** Consolidate other systems on a phased basis into the modern housing Management system or suitable corporate replacement. This includes reviewing current document management solutions.

### Outcomes

Systems deliver improved customer service, increased efficiency across the Group and reduction in systems costs.

## **11 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN**

Various consultation events were undertaken to determine how the IT Service and applications in use would meet the needs of users. These consultation events included Staff Voice, SHMT, Leadership Forum, and the IT Service itself. This has informed the development of this Strategy.

In summary the main areas of concern that surfaced from these events were:

- Over-reliance upon software suppliers whose solutions cannot adapt to changing demands in a timely manner and require expensive support.
- Inadequate data quality and process ownership leading to system complexity and “workarounds”.
- IT Resources are heavily engaged in managing and supporting existing systems, leaving little development time to tackle wider business improvement areas and embed best practice
- End user IT skills and knowledge insufficient in many areas on how to get the best out of systems and technology

All these points have been reflected within the strategic objectives of the IT Strategy.

## **12 RESOURCES NEEDED TO DELIVER STRATEGY**

The overall structure and establishment of the IT Service will need to be strengthened to successfully deliver these strategic objectives, especially in regards to objective 5 (the procurement and deployment of a modern housing management solution) and objective 4 (the data warehouse). A detailed cost benefit analysis of every initiative that has a significant resource requirement will be developed and monitored through the project boards and reported back to SHMT.

## **13 EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

The IT Strategy and its related actions have been developed to improve the overall experience to customers and staff and reduce any inherent inequality by increasing choice on how services are accessed. For example, providing greater online service capability whilst still retaining existing face to face, telephone services gives customers more options on service offering.

An increase in data accuracy and visibility, together with simplification in the range of systems in use will help ensure that communication preferences such as large format text, are met by all written corporate correspondence irrespective of service or system in use.

Providing staff with choice in IT equipment, together with suitable support and training should further reducing any disability inequalities, especially given the range of accessibility support that exists within modern technical solutions.

## **14 ACTION PLAN**

An action plan is attached at Appendix Two. The Action Plan shows the key activities to undertake to make sure that this strategy is implemented. The Action Plan identifies the person who will lead each action and the timeframe in which it should be completed. Implementing any change in service delivery will require prioritisation on workloads and an increase in resources over the medium term.

Individual programmes and projects will follow established project processes to ensure the correct outcome. Those that have a significant resource requirement will be managed through appropriate project Boards and be presented to SHMT for updates.

## **15 OWNERSHIP AND REVIEW**

This Strategy is owned by the Head of IT, who will monitor its implementation. The effectiveness of the strategy will be monitored through:

- Customer feedback of the IT Service
- Monitoring of service calls by type
- Regular technical review of the number and complexity of IT systems in use
- Post Implementation Reviews of business change projects

This Strategy will be reviewed by December 2021.