



# Scottish Local Government Digital Partnership

# Case Study

## Building Elected Member Leadership for Digital at Glasgow City Council

We have lived with technological advancement in local government for some time. It's nothing new. We have seen the transition from green-screen mainframe systems to desktop PCs, and most recently tablets and smart phones.

The first era of digital technology investments in local government has largely been orientated towards our staff to help them to undertake their duties more efficiently and effectively through line-of-business business systems. More recently, we entered a second digital era where technology was applied to transacting with citizens, making it easier for citizens to contact us and allowing councils to reduce the cost of each transaction when compared to face-to-face contact (the so-called "channel shift"). We are now at the cusp of a third era of the digital age, one where technology doesn't play just a support role anymore but one where it is embedded within front-line service delivery enabling better outcomes, greater partnership working, community empowerment, and prevention and early intervention. It has the potential to have a bigger impact on our society and our public services than anything we have seen before.

The technology catalyst for this third era is the cloud computing, the internet of things, big data, and artificial intelligence. The impact of these technologies are already being felt within society. Whether we like it or not, this new digital revolution is upon us and is firmly embedded within our society, and it is here to stay. It is exciting, it is vibrant (not least because it provides us with unique opportunities to transform public services and our economies), yet it will be challenging; we need to reconsider our traditional perceptions of our own services against ever increasing expectations of our citizens, and of our businesses. What's more, decisions about digital technology are no longer just process, technological and fiscal in nature; they need careful consideration of social and economic impacts such as inclusion, trust, privacy, cyber resilience, and the impact on employment.

With a GVA of £1.3bn, the digital sector is the fastest growing sector in Glasgow's economy which is one of the fastest growing economies in the UK. Since becoming the Innovate UK's Future Cities Demonstrator, the city has also gained valuable first-hand experience of the opportunities from (and the impact of) this third era of digital and it continues to make large investments in smart technology, big data analytics, and it is embracing open innovation to stimulate innovation that can transform public services and provide new economic opportunities.

In recognition of the enormous opportunities and risks for both Glasgow's economy and public services in the city **Glasgow City Council** has begun to make digital a policy matter and has elevated the leadership for digital to an elected member level. It has adopted a three-pronged approach to achieve this

1. The creation of a new elected member-led Digital Glasgow Board which is overseeing and scrutinising the development of a new digital strategy for the city, and will subsequently scrutinise the delivery of the strategy
2. Commitments to promoting and raising digital awareness amongst elected members;
3. Engagement with elected members to explore how digital technology could better support elected members in their own ward-level and council-level duties.

The **Digital Glasgow Board** realigns digital and technology ownership –no longer the province of officers but a consideration jointly owned between senior officers and elected members. The board is chaired by the Depute City Convener for Inclusive Economic Growth and has representation from seven elected members in total from across all four political groups. Joining the elected members are three officers, the Chief Executive Officer, Chief Digital Officer, and the Regional Director for Economic Growth. The board itself is accountable to the Council's City Administration Committee. The initial focus for the board is to work with partners from all sectors in the city to

develop a new digital strategy for the city. This is being achieved by more focused working groups that bring together board members with subject matters from across the public, voluntary, academic, and private sectors. The strategy will focus on the Digital Economy (including digital connectivity, digital inclusion and participation, digital skills and employment, and digital business and the economy) and Digital Public Services (including digital foundations, digital leadership, digital community engagement, and digital and smart services). The latter of which will align with the work happening across the local government in Scotland through the Local Government Digital Partnership.

There is increasing awareness of the opportunities that digital brings at Glasgow amongst elected members (not least to an increased influx of younger elected members), however it can be overwhelming for any community and so Glasgow has committed to raising further awareness. Rather than attempt to develop their own bespoke plans Glasgow is engaging with the Digital Office, Improvement Service and COSLA through the Digital Leadership for Elected Members programme to help to define a more general awareness programme for the sector that Glasgow councillors can benefit from.

In addition to the Digital Glasgow Board, a working group has also been created with elected members to explore how digital technology might better serve the role of an elected member. It's hoped that this will allow elected members to lead by example. Rejecting a technology-driven discussion, the working group has instead successfully made use of **service design** to focus on user needs and allow officers and elected members work together to co-design, prototype and respond to feedback (as opposed to documenting a list of requirements in advance).

Using [the Improvement Service induction guide](#) to assist, the roles have been reviewed against both council level responsibilities and ward level responsibilities which has resulted in four areas for exploration, each of which have an elected member who has been nominated as a sponsor.

1. Responsibilities in committees;
2. Understanding your ward;
3. Communication with constituents;
4. Empowering Communities.

For example the **Understanding Your Ward** work will explore the manner in which digital can enhance their understanding of ward data such as real-time and interactive dashboards that provide visualisations of demographics, statistics, community assets and services, and operational data about cases being managed by the council. It is also expected that this will be made available to communities. Prototypes will be used throughout this implementation and amendments made as required in response to user feedback.

Opportunities for Councillors to be assisted to **better communicate with their constituents is focused** on how digital can complement (rather than replace) more traditional methods of surgeries, calls and emails. For example it is expected that the use of (video-based) virtual surgeries will be prototyped and - in partnership with the Improvement Service and COSLA - councillors will be trained in the use of social media to help them conduct their council role alongside their current political usage.

Glasgow City Council recognises the scale of disruption and opportunity that digital is likely to bring and adapted and councillor are beginning to recognise that it is no longer just a back-office consideration for officers but a key policy and strategy consideration for elected members. They recognise that this will be a continual and ongoing process and have put in place mechanisms to ensure digital is, and will remain, at the heart of their vision for the foreseeable future.

**Footnote:**

*The projects listed are being used to help shape the Digital Office for Scottish Local Government's L02 Digital Leadership Elected Members project.*

*Colin Birchenall, Chief Technology Officer for the Digital Office and Chief Digital Officer for Glasgow City Council is keen to work in collaboration with other councils on these projects – looking not only to share the work he has been*

*involved in but also to learn from colleagues within the Digital Partnership about their considerations, work and digital vision.*

*Please email [colin.birchenall@digitaloffice.scot](mailto:colin.birchenall@digitaloffice.scot) if you would like to discuss any of these projects further.*

## **References**

Muhleisen, M., 2018. The Long and Short of The Digital Revolution. *Finance & Development*, 55(2), pp. 6-8.

*If you have a project that could be shared as a case study to other members of the Digital Partnership, email [info@digitaloffice.scot](mailto:info@digitaloffice.scot).*