

Cabinet

10 September 2020

Local Digital Declaration

Recommendations

That Cabinet:

1. Agrees that Warwickshire County Council signs up to the Local Digital Declaration.
2. Endorses the proposed next steps in benefiting from being signatories to the Declaration.

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 The Local Digital Declaration is an initiative led by the Local Digital Collaboration Unit at the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), in partnership with the Government Digital Service (GDS), and a collection of local authorities and sector bodies from across the UK. Signatories subscribe to five principles and a number of activities, set out [here](#) (five-page document).
- 1.2 The original declaration was co-authored in 2018 by 45 organisations including more than 20 local authorities. It calls on the sector to take collaborative actions to improve local services for users, support more diversity and competition in the public sector IT market, and offer better value for money by building reusable patterns and standards. The Declaration has to date been endorsed by more than one third of English principal local authorities, and each signatory has committed a ['first action'](#) in support of the movement.
- 1.3 This paper sets out the various benefits that can be derived from signing up to the declaration, along with an assessment of the limited number of risks it might present. In terms of resource commitments, this can be at our discretion and is likely to be a case of the more effort we put towards the initiative, the greater the potential benefits.
- 1.4 In summary, this is a low-risk commitment that is complementary to our existing strategic objectives. It will provide tangible evidence of our desire to be keeping pace with developments in digital and Cabinet is recommended to support this initiative.

2. Supporting Information

2.1 More information on the Local Digital Declaration (LDD) can be found here: <https://localdigital.gov.uk/declaration/>

2.2 The LDD Principles are set out below and are in line with our organisational and ICT strategies.

2.3 LDD Principles

- We will go even further to redesign our services around the needs of the people using them. This means continuing to prioritise citizen and user needs above professional, organisational and technological silos.
- We will 'fix our plumbing' to break our dependence on inflexible and expensive technology that doesn't join up effectively. This means insisting on modular building blocks for the IT we rely on, and open standards to give a common structure to the data we create.
- We will design safe, secure and useful ways of sharing information to build trust among our partners and citizens, to better support the most vulnerable members of our communities, and to target our resources more effectively.
- We will demonstrate digital leadership, creating the conditions for genuine organisational transformation to happen, and challenging all those we work with to embrace this Local Digital Declaration.
- We will embed an open culture that values, incentivises and expects digital ways of working from every member of our workforce. This means working in the open wherever we can, sharing our plans and experience, working collaboratively with other organisations, and reusing good practice.

2.4 Benefits

- Provides access to the £7.5m [Local Digital Fund](#) and one-off funding opportunities like the [Local Digital C-19 Challenge](#)
- Provides access to free Government Digital Service (GDS) Academy [training](#)
- Creates opportunities for collaboration with other local authorities and partners, including organisations regarded as innovative in this field such as Essex, Hackney, GMCA
- Shows progressive thinking and wanting to keep pace with new developments; encourages experimentation
- Access to peers via a useful online forum where ideas and innovations are shared
- Being more aware of and applying good practice from elsewhere should reduce effort and potentially lead to cost savings for example through joint procurement

- Promotes the use of open standards, reusable components and modularity (i.e. developing digital solutions in line with existing good practice, provides the opportunity to implement solutions developed elsewhere and to share our solutions with others)
- We would be joining Rugby BC as a local signatory to the declaration
- Our sub-regional partners, Coventry and Solihull, are already signatories and this would provide another formal route to collaboration with them.

2.5 Risks

- Greater transparency will invite more scrutiny and challenge in our approach to digital (not necessarily a bad thing, but we will need to be receptive to challenge)
- Would require greater 'working in the open' and may require a greater willingness to acknowledge 'failure' (again, this might bring benefits rather than present risk)
- May introduce some limited overheads such as a commitment to blogging and sharing experiences (although this might be encouraged as part of staff development and raising WCC's profile)
- May, over the medium-term, push us towards changing our resource profile through needing to upskill staff so that we can adopt best practice approaches
- Co-producing with other local authorities will introduce more complexity and governance issues, with an impact on delivery timescales.

2.6 Requirements

- Committing to a ['first action'](#), which would involve completing a project in line with the Declaration principles
- Committing to more external communication and sharing of experiences, such as blogging e.g. <https://dataingovernment.blog.gov.uk/>
- Visibly demonstrating a commitment to the principles behind the Declaration; WCC is already working to these principles in many respects and signing up to the declaration will not need a radical change of direction
- Providing staff with the time and space to engage with wider communities and explore opportunities.

2.7 Next Steps

- Corporate Board has already endorsed this as an approach. With Cabinet approval, the next step is to sign the declaration. The Strategic Director for Resources will be the formal signatory with the Service Manager for Business Intelligence as the day-to-day contact with MHCLG and wider network

- Establish a task and finish group to complete the following activities:
 - Issue some internal communications and raise awareness of the declaration
 - Identify and agree proposals for a 'first action' project, to be approved and overseen by the Data & Digital Board (some potential areas are listed in the appendix).

3. Financial Implications

- 3.1 There is no direct financial cost in signing up to the declaration.
- 3.2 There may be resource implications as the working group identifies potential projects to fulfil our commitment to a 'first action'. These should not be significant and would be aligned with activity the council would want to deliver anyway in line with our change portfolio and would therefore be delivered through existing service or transformation funding.
- 3.3 Although not an explicit objective, there may be commercial opportunities if WCC develops digital products that have value to other local government organisations.

4. Environmental Implications

- 4.1 No direct environmental implications, although there may be opportunities to learn from digital projects elsewhere that have delivered environmental benefits.

5. Timescales associated with the decision and next steps

- 5.1 There is no deadline we need to meet in order to be signatories to this initiative, but the sooner we sign up the sooner we can benefit from the opportunities it presents. The formalities of signing up to the LDD can be completed within a month of Cabinet approval.

Background Papers

None

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The report was circulated to the following members prior to publication:

Local Member(s): N/A

Other members: Lead Scrutiny Members

Appendix - Potential 'first actions'

WCC would need to commit to a 'first action' project, involving partners. Some illustrative examples are listed below. The working group would evaluate these and other opportunities and bring proposals through appropriate governance arrangements.

- Support our work on economic recovery - capturing data from the local economy to enable us to support with greater insight, more dynamic understanding of specific local issues and operate more proactively rather than assume businesses will approach us to gain support and advice (e.g. 'smart outbound messaging').
- Explore opportunities to capture better insight from the local VCS sector and charities, in support of our VCS Strategy and the re-commissioning of our VCS services in 2021.
- Digital/data apprenticeship academy and remote working experience with various councils (Hackney are looking for partners on this).
- Mapping of businesses and community assets (Huntingdon are seeking partners on this).
- Delivering public consultations and engagement in an increasingly virtual environment (Kingston/ Sutton/ Cambridgeshire/ Northamptonshire all looking for partners on this and it would align with our emerging Participation & Engagement Framework).