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Digital Strategy

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Introduction

Digital and information technologies have transformed lives on an unprecedented scale and will continue to do so at an accelerated pace. Over the past few years, technology has developed with extraordinary speed, driven by advances in artificial intelligence (AI), renewable energy and advanced computing. AI has become ever more capable and integrated into everyday life and will continue to shape how we deliver our services in the future.

We want to make sure the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) builds on the progress we have made so far and that we design our services and the technology behind them to meet the fast pace of development and the growing need for simple, user focused digital services.

Our digital strategy has been developed to support the delivery of our **Strategic Plan** and focuses on how we want to do things to support customer and business requirements. Our strategy is not about delivering digital technologies; it is about delivering user-led and user-centred services in the digital age.

Our digital strategy is based on research with our customers and is aligned with the **Digital Strategy for Scotland, A changing nation: how Scotland will thrive in a digital world.**

Policy

We align our own digital strategy with the Scottish Government's digital strategy to drive our digital future. Basic digital skills are required for nearly every job and in supporting the social service sector, our strategy must support the digital capability of our own staff and the social work, social care and children and young people workforce.

We developed our digital strategy at a time of considerable change within the policy landscape of the social service sector. We will support the social work, social care and children and young people workforce to increase their digital capacity and capability so that they can deliver technology enabled care as set out in [Scotland's Digital Health and Care Strategy: enabling, connecting and empowering](#).

'We will support the social work, social care and children and young people workforce to increase their digital capacity...'

Informing our strategy

We continually seek the views of our customers, stakeholders and staff. From our research and information gathering we have determined there are three key themes to consider when developing our strategy.

- 01.** Scotland's social service workforce is hugely diverse and challenges with digital literacy need to be addressed.
- 02.** Many registered workers face practical barriers to connecting with the SSSC's digital interfaces.
- 03.** There is a very cluttered learning and development landscape in the sector.

In summary, the research highlighted the following considerations for this digital strategy.

- Customers want an enhanced inclusive digital offering and to be sure the regulated workforce can use digital skills to improve their practice.
- Customers want easy and streamlined access to learning and development resources in the social service sector.
- Stakeholders want timely, accurate and one place to view all data which helps support national planning for the sector

When designing our services, we will also be mindful of **The Scottish Approach to Service Design (SAtSD)** to help ensure our services are designed both for and with the user.

Vision

Our vision is for digital and information technology to have a transformational impact for the staff who deliver our services and for the users of our services.

A key aim of the digital strategy is to make sure our organisation is truly enhanced by the use of digital and information technology, with developments aligned with organisational objectives and operational need.

'...make sure our organisation is truly enhanced by the use of digital and information technology...'

01

Principles and themes

It is important that the strategy is flexible, agile and can be adapted to further internally and externally driven changes. The strategy is based around the following key principles and themes. →



Principles

Right access, right time



Design and deliver inclusive and accessible services using the right technology.

Customer service focus



Understand our customers' challenges and opportunities to provide user-centric services.

Effective governance



Ensure all activities associated with digital and information technology are aligned with overall business objectives.

Continual service improvement



To be future-focused, to listen to user feedback and continually find opportunities for service improvement.

Themes

User experience



— To ensure all digital systems and resources are effective, integrated and aligned to the needs of our users.

We know our users want to interact with us digitally and want to use our services 24/7, with an increased desire to use mobile devices. We know our users want a single place to access our services and a more joined-up experience of the different services we offer. Our digital learning resources will be informed by the sector's development priorities to ensure they reduce duplication and add value for the sector.

Our focus will be to deliver an enhanced digital journey, ensuring that finding and using our services is simplified and personalised.

What this means

- Create a one stop shop for all our services.
- Ensure all services are fully accessible.
- Develop better integration between registration and learning and development services and resources.
- Improved signposting of external services and improved collaboration to deliver joined up public services.
- Develop further personalisation of our services.
- Design and develop consistent branding across all digital services.
- Investigate a single authentication mechanism, delivering a single username/ password to access our services.
- Redesign our business processes by developing end-to-end digital services.
- Ensure all our services are fully supported, including providing an assisted digital service.

Data informed



— To collect, store, manage, share and use data and information, supporting the organisation to make the best business decisions.

The SSSC collects datasets from our many business systems and from external organisations. It is more important than ever that we produce evidence and intelligence that helps us, and others, make the right decisions.

Our focus will be to identify, store, provide, process, share and govern our data and information to support decision making and improve reporting.

What this means

- Deploy visualisation and reporting tools to provide managers and others with self-service dashboards and access to real time information.
- Create processes to share data that is as up to date as it can be with external organisations.
- Training and support for staff on how to use tools and technology to make more informed decisions.
- Ensure data sharing and data processing is compliant with our legal obligations.

Intelligent automation



— To examine and adopt emerging AI technologies to support further process automation, enhancements and efficiencies.

We will analyse our existing business processes and identify areas where emerging technology can optimise performance, create efficiencies and improve our offering to our customers.

What this means

- **Automating routine tasks.** Continue to support tasks such as data entry, scheduling, minute taking and document processing, freeing up staff to spend time on the most important work.
- **Process optimisation.** Look at how we can use AI as an analysis tool to identify bottlenecks and inefficiencies, recommending improvements that create more effective processes and faster response times where appropriate.
- **Continuous improvement.** Look at how machine learning enables processes to adapt and optimise over time, using real-time data to drive ongoing enhancements.
- **Personalisation and targeted approaches.** Continue to use AI to support personalisation of our communications and recommendations aligned to individual customer needs.
- **Predictive service.** Look at how we can use AI to anticipate customer needs and proactively resolve issues, shifting from reactive to dynamic, predictive engagement.
- **Data-driven insight.** Look at how AI can help us process structured and unstructured data, uncovering patterns and trends that inform better decision making.
- **Principles and guidance.** We will establish principles and guidance for the ethical use of AI by the social service workforce.
- **Learning and development.** We will identify and where necessary develop learning opportunities for the social service workforce to enable them to use AI ethically and safely.

Intelligent automation continued



- **Regulation.** We will develop guidance on how AI can and cannot be used by registrants in relation to our regulatory activity, for example submitting learning applications, regulation processes and international qualification assessments.
- **Data protection and privacy.** It's crucial to only use AI tools that are approved by the Digital Team and to never input sensitive organisational data into external, unapproved platforms. This protects privacy and ensures compliance with regulations. We will develop a governance framework reflected in existing policies and procedures about the use and management of AI in the organisation and how we support the sector with AI and their interactions with us.
- **Bias and fairness.** AI systems must be monitored for bias and regularly reviewed to ensure outputs are fair and ethical. We will robustly test any new tools that may impact bias or fairness before implementation.
- **Human oversight.** AI should support, not replace, human judgment, especially in areas requiring empathy, ethics or complex decision-making. Our use of AI will complement the experience and subject expertise of our staff.
- **Cyber security.** Any AI tools will be robustly assessed for risks and only approved tools will be implemented for use by the organisation.

Technology architecture



— To develop and maintain a flexible and sustainable design for the physical and logical digital systems and follow a robust set of guidelines for new systems and future developments.

Our technology architecture needs to allow services and information to be available 24/7 and staff need to securely access our technology platforms from any location. Simplified technology architecture and the integration of information technologies will be a fundamental building block in delivering an enhanced digital offering to our customers.

Our focus will be to assess the most appropriate way to implement digital infrastructure that meets best value. We will design, develop and maintain a technology infrastructure to support the current and future digital needs of the organisation with an emphasis on leveraging cloud technologies and managed services.

What this means

- Continue to use public cloud technologies to deliver flexible and sustainable services allowing the organisation to be agile and respond to further internal and externally driven changes.
- Collaborate with partner organisations with a focus on service delivery and not being constrained by organisational boundaries.
- Continue to focus on using managed services to deliver and support our critical information technology architecture.
- Ensure all technological infrastructure and services are fully supported, either internally or through support agreements with external suppliers.
- Rationalise and consolidate our web architecture.
- Provide more joined-up and collaborative services.
- Work more closely with strategic partners to design, develop and support our learning and development resources.

Security and compliance



— To meet our moral and legal obligations in securing, storing and sharing information and resources.

With the increased dependence on digital systems, organisations are becoming more vulnerable to digital security threats. The growth of cloud computing and mobile devices provides new opportunities for unauthorised access to systems. Digital security threats are generally expected to become more widespread and increasingly sophisticated.

Our focus will be to take a risk-based approach, aligning people, process and technology to ensure our information and resources are secure from unauthorised access.

What this means

- Implement appropriate technical controls to mitigate against cyber threats, including network and device security and access control and authentication.
- Ensure technical controls meet National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) best practice guidance.
- Continually evaluate cyber threats and ensure technology controls and processes evolve and are effective in managing cyber risk.
- Work closely with external suppliers to ensure cyber threats are appropriately controlled for our externally managed services.
- Deliver appropriate cyber security awareness training to staff.
- Deliver simulated cyber attacks to support staff awareness of common threats.
- Provide external assurance through audits and maintain the Cyber Essentials Plus accreditation, a UK Government backed scheme to help protect against the most common cyber attacks.
- Join the Cyber Security Information Sharing Partnership (CiSP) to better understand and share cyber threat information.
- Create, maintain and test comprehensive disaster recovery and business continuity plans to minimise the impact of cyber threats.
- Training and support for staff on how to use tools and technology to make more informed decisions.

Digital inclusion



— To ensure systems and services are easy to use and accessible and to provide opportunities to increase the digital capability of our service users.

While we live in a digital age, we also know from our research that not all users have either confidence or skills and many have challenges with connectivity and access to devices. Our research has also highlighted the importance of digital technologies being accessible and easy to use.

Our focus will be to design and develop easy to navigate and accessible systems with an emphasis on user experience. The SSSC will also play an active role in increasing the digital capabilities of the social service workforce, supplemented by an assisted digital support model.

What this means

- Enhance the customer portal to improve the user experience and help users find what they need.
- Design our services with accessibility at the core, meeting our obligations under The Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) (No. 2) Accessibility Regulations 2018.
- Develop an assisted digital model to support users who lack confidence, capability or have challenges with connectivity or access to suitable devices.
- Work with partners to increase the digital capabilities of the social service workforce through the development of additional resources.
- All digital services and resources will be designed and developed to be mobile responsive.

Digital workforce



— To ensure SSSC staff have the right skills and capabilities to live and work in a digital world.

Digital and information technologies have become integral to personal and professional life and almost all roles require staff to interact with technology. New technologies are only as effective as the staff trained to use them and it is essential staff have the required digital capabilities to adapt and thrive.

Our focus will be to understand the digital capability of staff and ensure there is training to achieve a skills transformation in an ever-changing digital age.

Externally we will continue to support the development of wider digital capabilities across the sector so the social service workforce can adapt confidently to new and emerging technologies.

What this means

- Undertake a digital skills assessment to identify gaps and help form a training needs analysis.
- Ensure Digital Services staff have the capability to support and maintain core digital infrastructure.
- Ensure digital training is incorporated into development discussions and personal development plans.
- Engage with the sector to understand their digital capabilities and work together with partners to ensure the social work, social care, children and young people workforce continues to develop digital skills and improve practice.
- Provide training on new and existing technologies ensuring staff are skilled and motivated to deliver services in the digital age.
- Invest in existing staff to create a long-term digital talent pipeline.

Delivering and resourcing



For each theme, the key deliverables will be detailed in the annual operational plan to ensure there is budget and resource allocated as required and other elements will be based on business cases and evidence. Resources for these elements will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

The SSSC will pursue national funding opportunities where available to supplement business cases for any additional requirements that come up during the year, with a focus on return on investment and robust procurement and financial management.

Delivering the key initiatives alongside staff's day to day roles will require flexible, cross-departmental working, supported by the Programme Management Office and governed by the Digital Programme Board.

'The SSSC will pursue national funding opportunities where available to supplement business cases...'

Evaluation and measuring impact

How will we know if our digital strategy is working?

We will measure success using a combination of regular analysis of stakeholder feedback, asking people if what we are doing is working and by measuring against the outputs from each theme.

When implementing digital improvements and developments we will regularly report progress to our Digital Programme Board, Digital Sponsor and Council.

The SSSC Council is responsible for approving this strategy and it will receive annual reports on the implementation and effectiveness of our digital strategy.

'When implementing digital improvements and developments we will regularly report progress to our Digital Programme Board...'



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