

Improvement Support to Councils – Cyber, Digital and Technology

Purpose:

For information.

Summary

The Cyber, Digital and Technology (CDT) Programme aims to support the improvement of digital services for councils and their residents in as secure a way as possible.

It is a hybrid programme using funding from both DLUHC and the Cabinet Office, totalling £4.4m.

Its antecedent programmes (Cyber and Digital) have, over the last three years, together supported over 90% of English councils.

The programme is funded until the end of this financial year, with the future of the programme dependent upon SR21.

Recommendation/s

That IIB notes the progress of the programme.

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Improvement Support to Councils – Cyber, Digital and Technology

Background

1. From video conferencing and the digitisation of public meetings to new data sharing and online services, local government services are subject to continuous and accelerated digital innovation. As such, councils, the services they provide, and the welfare of the residents who rely upon them, are subject to ever increasing cyber security risks.
2. In the last 24 months, Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council and the London Borough of Hackney have both been the victims of cyber incidents categorised as equal in severity to the NHS Wannacry attack of 2017; so constituting two of the three most severe public sector cyber security events ever to have occurred in the UK. The National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) has projected that the cyber security threat, and in particular that associated with ransomware, will continue to rise across the public sector.

Programme Funding, Structure and Approach

3. Out of this year's DLUHC grant, we have been funded to provide a digital and transformational support offer to: **“provide councils with sustained and coordinated support to build digital expertise and generate low-cost interventions that improve outcomes for local areas”** including the delivery of:
 - A **Digital Inclusion Programme**, which provides access to leading digital experts (from the private sector and supplemented by peers) to improve the skills of residents who lack the knowledge, confidence and/or infrastructure to access online technologies.
 - A **Digital Connectivity Programme** to ensure councils can continue to explore and harness the power of new technologies to improve service delivery.
 - Support for good governance through the **Remote Councils Meeting Hub**, which provides tools and support to ensure high standards of governance and local scrutiny are maintained.
4. Additionally, in December 2020, we secured a fourth year of funding from the Cabinet Office Government Security Group under the National Cyber Security Programme (NCSP). The aim of the cybersecurity component of the CDT programme remains to improve the cyber security of local authorities, with the desired strategic outcome of the NCSP being that:

Government networks and services will be as secure as possible from the moment of their first implementation. The public will be able to use government digital services with confidence and trust that their information is safe.
5. In January 2021, Susan Attard, Head of Productivity, merged the Cyber and Digital programmes into one in order to optimise the use of similar networks, and to create efficiencies between the two programmes.

6. The integrated aim of the newly formed CDT programme is to:

To support the improvement of digital services for councils and their residents in as secure way as possible.

7. The programme strives to:

- Focus on transformative initiatives that create sustainable organisational change and are relevant for the whole sector.
- Consider all stakeholder groups to ensure inclusivity, access and – where necessary – bespoke support solutions.
- Develop councils' capabilities through consultation, cooperation and – where appropriate – constructive criticism.
- Promote a service driven approach that aims to integrate all aspects of information security, digital transformation, and emerging technology.
- Offer a single LGA point of contact for all things related to information security, digital transformation, and emerging technology.
- Act as a one-to-many and many-to-one conduit between central and local government.
- Focus on developing the council's own capability to identify and react to risks and opportunities, rather than prescribed solutions.
- Adhere to established technical language and models.
- Use diverse and representative voices and faces.
- Support all councils regardless of their digital and cyber maturity.

Progress so far in 2021/22

9. Building on the success of its antecedent programmes in supporting over 90% of English councils over the last three years, highlights from this financial year so far include:

- securing of an additional £2.4m of in-year funding'
- recruiting 4 new staff to deliver projects in accordance with the new funding;
- delivery of a security testing project on 10% of councils;
- commissioning a Cyber Security Scrutiny guide for councillors;
- commissioning a Digital Inclusion Return on Investment Model;
- reshaping and delivery of the Local Government Digital Committee (formerly the Local Government Delivery Council) and its sub-groups (for transformation, policy, technical cyber advice, inclusion and chief Information Officers);
- delivery of the first phases of the digital Pathfinders programme to fund councils to develop innovative approaches to connectivity, inclusivity, and cyber security issues;
- User engagement on a Tech Essentials eLearning package;
- events and technical workshops for over 500 participants;
- a monthly newsletter;
- promotion and increased uptake of NCSC Active Cyber Defence Tools; and
- engagements with Central Government and industry to support policy development and good practice across a number of areas relating to cyber, digital, and technology.

Risks

10. There are two strategic risks of note:

- We remain uncertain of the future of the programme beyond March 2022. We expect further clarity in the weeks following SR21.
- Due to in-year funding uplifts and a pause in the procurement of one of the high-cost projects (until we get clarity on the future of the programme), there is a high likelihood of NCSP underspend and carry over. The Cabinet Office has made clear that is highly likely to authorise any necessary carry over. (There is no underspend risk for the DLUHC funding.)

Implications for Wales

11. Both the NCSP funding and the DLUHC funding is intended solely for the benefit of English councils. However:

- The development of new policies and tools will frequently benefit Welsh councils.
- Technical learning is shared with Welsh Councils through the SOCITM Cyber Technical Advisory Group (C-TAG) which the programme partially funds.
- Welsh Councils are invited to events organised and paid for by our programme.
- We collaborate regularly with the Welsh LGA on a number of initiatives.

Equalities implications

12. The CDT programme funds and supports inclusivity projects which in turn improve accessibility to public services.

13. The CDT programme seeks to ensure EDI aims are met operationally, for example through recruitment practices, media accessibility, representation at events, meetings, project boards and procurement panels.

Financial implications

15. The CDT programme is delivered by the LGA with funding from both DLUHC and the Cabinet Office. Both grants are for the period ending March 2022. The LGA has put forward a bid for further NCSP funding. We expect clarity on this funding in the weeks following SR21.

Next steps

16. Beyond the delivery of this year's programme of work, decisions on next steps will not be made until we gain further clarity on the future of the programme.