



## **ICT Strategy 2014-15 to 2017-18**

*Michael Harding, ICT Team Manager, February 2014*

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## Context & Introduction

The North West Leicestershire District Council ICT Service supports 385 internal customers accessing service specific computer systems to help control the day to day management of key Council services, as well as standard office applications including email, Internet access, word processing and spreadsheets.

The Council's "Improving the Customer Experience" (ICE) programme is delivering website improvements and contact centre technologies to make it easier for residents to access Council services, and allow access to a wider range of self-service options online at a time and place and using a device of their choosing. The ICT Service is instrumental in delivering the ICT systems needed to support this programme and as such is aligning its processes and priorities to meet the demands of residents as well as internal customers.

These ICT customers, internal and external, are supported by a team of 10 ICT staff who are employed directly by the Council. The ICT infrastructure includes approximately 100 computer servers together with associated disk storage arrays and networking equipment.

Following a review of the ICT Service in October 2013 (Appendix A), this strategy sets out our direction and plans for the next four years: how will we meet or exceed the demands of our customers whilst controlling costs to ensure value?

## Purpose of the ICT Service

To contribute to the provision of good-quality, high-value front line Council services to residents by helping front line service teams and other corporate support teams exploit technology to deliver their services efficiently and effectively.

### How we will do it:

Historically, the ICT Service has introduced and supported ICT systems in reaction to requests from customers in other teams. Going forward, the ICT Service will adopt a more proactive stance, using our experience to identify and promote opportunities for exploiting technologies and working with our customers through the whole ICT systems lifecycle.

- We will strengthen our Business Analysis function and broaden our offering to include focused market research to identify new opportunities, business case development for new proposals and wider support for technology projects to include process development as well as the delivery of ICT components
- We will actively promote continual improvement of ICT systems by encouraging and supporting system improvement groups and leading effective dialogue between our customers and our suppliers

## ICT Service Aims

We aim to be the ICT service provider of choice for the Council by delivering services internally that are flexible and dynamic and can compete on cost and quality with the best that external providers can

offer. In the medium term, we aim to develop services that are best in class and can be sold to other Councils, either locally or nationally.

#### **How we will do it:**

- We will structure the ICT service along industry standard lines to allow us to benchmark ourselves against public and private sector ICT service providers, using SOCITM (Society of IT Management) data in the first instance
- We will use our supplier network to develop contacts with other Councils who might be potential customers for our services, identifying ourselves as best practice providers through case studies and active participation in technical seminars and similar events

## **Customer Co-production**

ICT customers have historically been Council Officers and Members needing access to Council ICT systems. More recently, public access to ICT services has started to be made available via the Council's website. In order to ensure that the ICT Service meets or exceeds expectations of both internal and external customers, the ICT Team will continue to engage its customers in systems and service development projects.

#### **How we will do it:**

##### ***Internal Customers***

- We will facilitate or support system improvement groups using the model that has successfully deployed in the Housing Service (OHIG – OPENHousing Improving Group). The first of these groups is an Idox Improvements Group which will meet for the first time in March 2014 to start to identify and plan opportunities for gaining maximum benefit from the Idox suite of systems which are used extensively in Environmental Services, Planning and Building Control.
- We will actively involve our customers in new projects by ensuring that system users are part of project teams as appropriate for all new projects
- We will conduct an annual satisfaction survey to solicit views for our customers which will then form an input to the ICT Team's annual business plan

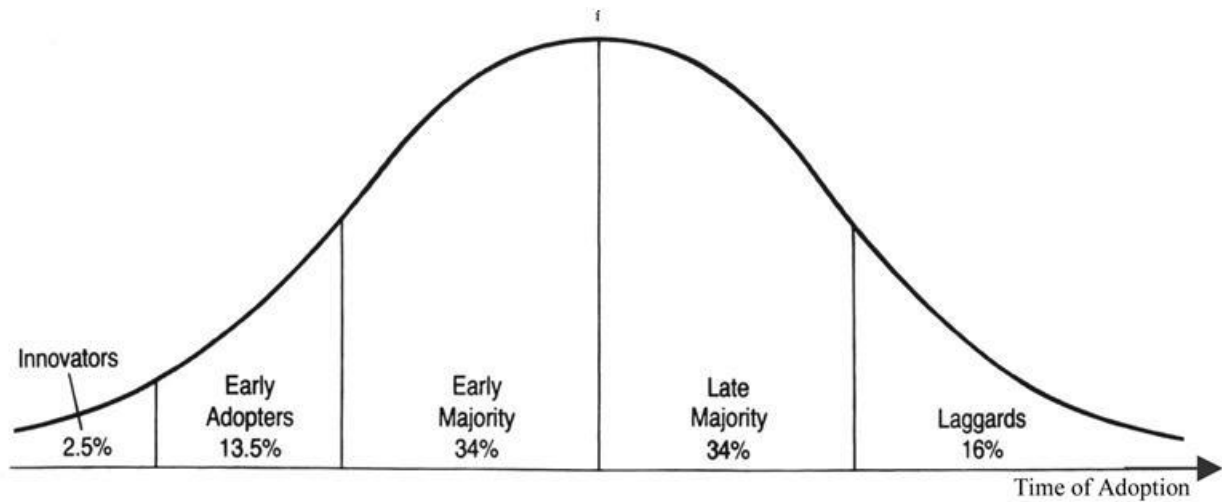
##### ***External Customers***

- We will work closely with the Council's Customer Services Team to ensure that ICT systems design is aligned to the needs of the Council's customers and not just to the needs of the teams that deliver front line services
- We will attend customer working group meetings as invited and actively solicit feedback from customers, allowing us to shape our plans and priorities accordingly

## **Approach to Innovation & Risk**

An informal review of the Council's adoption of new technology suggests that the ICT Service has historically taken a cautious approach. Although formal benchmarking and comparison has not yet been

completed, initial investigation suggests that this approach is typical of other Councils and places the Council at the boundary between Early Majority and Late Majority on the Innovation Adoption Curve (see figure 1, below) when compared with other councils. However, when compared with private sector organizations, the Council appears to be in the Late Majority. This is particularly evident in areas such as computer server technology, where the Council has been late adopting virtual environments. In some areas, such as telephony, the Council is still using analogue technology that has largely been superseded in the private sector.



**Figure 1: Innovation Adoption Curve**

Going forward, in order to meet its aim of maintaining competitiveness with the best external providers, the ICT Service will aim to adopt new technologies with the “Early Majority” when compared to the industry as a whole. This approach presents a low risk to the Council since any technology deployed will have been extensively deployed and tested elsewhere and very much part of the main stream of technology adoption.

**How we will do it:**

- We will take a more innovative stance when introducing and upgrading systems, looking at what the industry is doing as a whole and not just what other councils are doing. This will allow us to realize the cost and service benefits associated with newer technologies without undue risk.

**Technical Delivery Strategy**

One of the most significant ICT trends in recent years has been a move to cloud computing. That is, instead of the traditional model of delivering ICT services from a local computer room, organizations pay a fee to use systems hosted by a cloud services provider. Those systems are accessed via an internet connection. This approach allows organizations to benefit from the economies of scale associated with a larger scale centralized delivery model.

For example, the Customer Gateway that the ICE programme is delivering to add self-service options to the Council's website and provide a contact records system for the Customer Services team is being delivered as a cloud service. As well as costing approximately 70% less than the locally owned and hosted options considered, there are significant service delivery advantages. The software runs on servers that are hosted in a "tier 3" data centre, meaning that the service is highly resilient due to multiple spare servers, network connections, power sources, etc. (if one component fails another will automatically take over). The system is monitored on a 24 x 7 basis, which would not be practical with a small internal team. It also allows the Council to easily scale up and scale down the service according to demand, i.e. should extra capacity be needed during peak times such as during annual Council Tax billing, it can be quickly and economically added then released afterwards, further reducing cost since there is no capital requirement.

Going forward, the Council will actively aim towards moving services into the cloud in order to realize the benefits of this delivery model.

#### **How we will do it:**

- Delivery via the cloud will be the default option for new services, with services only delivered on site where there are clear cost or service benefits to be gained for doing this
- We will work towards standardizing the computer room infrastructure that supports existing services so we have a cost effective option moving all services to the cloud when the current in house infrastructure reaches the end of its economic life in 2017-19

## **Resourcing**

The ICT service is delivered by an in house team, making use of specialized support contracts where this is appropriate. This approach allows us to remain close to our customers, understanding their business processes and priorities and identifying opportunities for the effective and efficient use of technology. To allow us to continue to be flexible and dynamic we will remain internally resourced.

However, the ICT team is large in relation to the size of the Council. Stabilizing and standardizing the existing infrastructure will decrease the demands on the team, so the team will gradually reduce in size to match this decreasing demand. It is expected that this will be achieved through the Council's vacancy review process: as staff leave roles will not be backfilled.

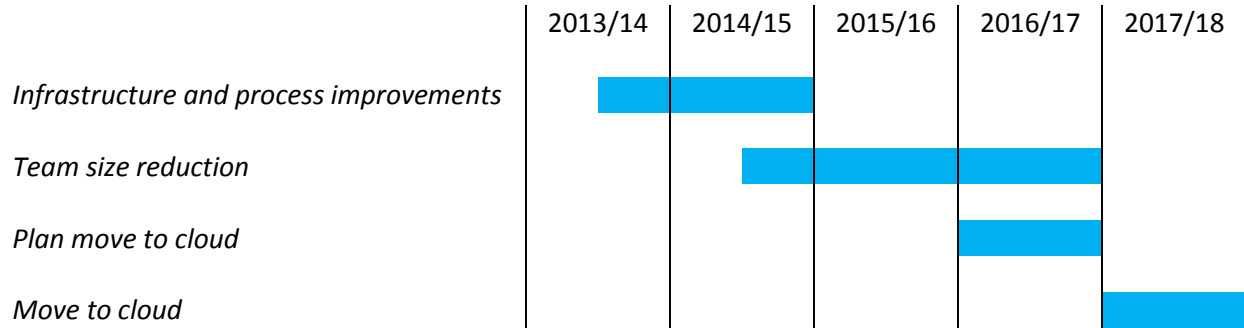
It is also noted that a move to cloud services will change the nature of the work that is done by the ICT team and that some roles will be affected by this.

#### **How we will do it:**

- We will freeze permanent recruitment to allow us to reduce the size of the team in a manner that is sensitive to the needs of a hard working and high performing team.
- Where recruitment is absolutely necessary, this will be via temporary contracts.
- We will review roles as part of future strategy work to be done in preparation for a move to cloud computing

## Medium Term Plan

The chart below summarizes core ICT activity from 2013/14 to 2017/18.



Further details are included in the appendices to the attached report of the review of ICT services that was completed in October 2013.