

SUBJECT: Digital, Data and Technology Collaboration

MEETING: Cabinet

DATE: 21st May 2025

DIVISION/WARDS AFFECTED: All

1. PURPOSE:

- 1.1 To develop proposals to build on existing collaborative arrangements in place for the provision of technology services through the Shared Resource Service. Expanding these to include digital, data and information governance services will generate economies of scale enabling the authority to access expertise to accelerate progress against delivery of priorities set in the Community and Corporate Plan and the Council's Digital and Data Strategy.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 To begin the process of transitioning towards a shared service model for digital and data in collaboration with Torfaen County Borough Council and Blaenau Gwent County Borough, as part of an expanded role for the Shared Resource Service (SRS).
- 2.2 For the authority's digital team to begin working alongside partner organisations at the earliest opportunity, with a target for the team to transfer to the SRS no later than 1st April 2026, subject to the conclusion of staff and trade union consultation. This would be done in accordance with The Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 2006.
- 2.3 To agree that the current digital service budget be used to enable the delivery of the new shared service.
- 2.4 To prepare an investment case for a modern data service operating across three authorities, to be considered by the SRS Strategic Board in the first instance, being clear where the initial investment is best focused.
- 2.5 That Cabinet recommend that £77,017 is drawn from the ICT reserve to fund the costs during year one of the collaboration (2025-26). This will include additional funding for the shared digital team and the costs of a new data post to ensure that Monmouthshire can participate fully in, and capitalise from, the embryonic data service from day one.
- 2.6 To revisit the potential to enter collaborative arrangements in relation to information security at a later stage following the completion of further work which will be reported to the SRS Strategic Board in the coming months.

3. KEY ISSUES:

- 3.1 The Council has a clear purpose to become a zero-carbon county that supports well-being, health, and dignity for everyone at every stage of life. Digital and data are recognised as key enablers that will help us achieve these outcomes. Our ability to make full use of these technologies is currently constrained by capacity and capability. With limited budgets the opportunity to invest the sums that would be required to bring about the necessary change is constrained. Neighbouring authorities in Blaenau Gwent and Torfaen are in a similar position. By collaborating, the authorities will be able to capitalise on economies of scale to attract and retain a workforce with the skills to take us to the next level in the use of digital and data.
- 3.2 All three organisations, along with Newport City Council, are partners in the Shared Resource Service (SRS) which has successfully supplied our technology services since 2011. The SRS Strategic Board commissioned and endorsed exploratory work which has identified the potential for SRS to expand its operations to encompass Digital, Data and Technology (sometimes referred to as DDaT). The initial paper received and agreed by the Board is included as a background paper at appendix 2. Anticipated benefits are:
- Resilience for service development and delivery
 - Increased momentum to meet partner organisations digital ambitions
 - Maximising skills and capacity and avoiding duplication
 - Wider development opportunities for staff
 - User centred design shaping services.
- 3.3 To understand whether this was feasible, a group of senior officers met over several months as a *Futures Group*, drawing on the support of the Local Partnerships consultancy. Examination of the Digital and Data Strategies identified common themes across all four partners making collaboration feasible. These are:
- Mission One: Digital Skills Development
- Train staff to enhance their digital skills to ensure they are equipped to deliver customer-centric services.
 - Develop digital leadership among senior managers and elected members.
 - Promote digital literacy within the community to support vulnerable groups and ensure inclusivity.
- Mission Two: Customer-Centred Services
- Design and implement services that prioritise the needs and experiences of customers.
 - Utilise user-centred design principles to ensure services are intuitive and accessible.
 - Offer digital solutions that are available 24/7 and can be accessed from any device or location.
- Mission Three: Collaboration and Innovation
- Foster a culture of collaboration both within the council and with external partners.
 - Embrace new technologies and innovative solutions to improve service delivery.

- Explore opportunities for regional, national, and local collaboration to enhance service efficiency.

Mission Four: Data and Evidence-Based Decision Making

- Improve data quality and use data analytics to make informed decisions.
- Ensure data is protected and shared appropriately to enhance service delivery.
- Utilise data to anticipate and proactively address customer needs.

Mission Five: Technology and Infrastructure

- Develop and maintain a reliable, secure, and adaptable digital infrastructure.
- Implement cloud-based solutions to improve accessibility, resilience, and sustainability.
- Invest in digital infrastructure projects such as broadband, Wi-Fi, and 5G to support city-wide connectivity.

Mission Six: Automation and Efficiency

- Automate routine tasks to free up staff for more value-added activities.
- Explore the use of Robotic Process Automation (RPA) and Artificial Intelligence (AI) to streamline operations.
- Continuously review and improve IT systems to enhance customer experience and operational efficiency.

Mission Seven: Sustainability and Inclusivity

- Ensure digital solutions align with sustainability goals and reduce the carbon footprint.
- Provide traditional service channels for those unable to access digital services, ensuring no one is left behind.
- Develop digital services that meet accessibility standards and support the Welsh language.

- 3.4 In addition to these points, collaboration will enhance the ability of partners to tackle inequalities through better use of digital and data in line with the Marmot principles endorsed by the Gwent Public Services Board. This includes preventing issues from occurring or worsening and contributing to better health outcomes.
- 3.5 A shared digital, data and technology service promotes a holistic and integrated approach to public service delivery, making it more efficient, innovative, inclusive, and responsive to the needs of users. This new way of thinking about public services leverages the collective strengths of multiple organisations to provide higher-quality, more effective, and sustainable services to the public. Partners will work with the Centre for Digital Public Services to ensure that we work in accordance with the twelve [digital service standards for Wales](#).
- 3.6 Creating seamless access to data will provide practitioners with a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of communities, groups of people and individuals. For example, regional data can highlight disparities in health outcomes, educational attainment, and economic opportunities across different geographies, enabling targeted interventions that promote greater equity and cohesion. This will enable them to make more timely and effective decisions which should lead to better outcomes for individuals. It will also enable us to increase the frequency of data reporting improving the ability of councillors and managers to make data-enabled decisions.

- 3.7 Bringing these services together will enable a shift in how digital and data are used to deliver social value and community benefit. Working together at scale will enable the teams to attract and retain a workforce with high level skills. This will be afforded by reducing duplication and creating new roles that would be unaffordable to Monmouthshire County Council or the other partners, if working in isolation. The new approach would enable the creation of agile, responsive, and resilient solutions, as well as a digital culture that drives value for money into the partner's medium term financial plans, through efficiency and improvement.
- 3.8 The data functions that will sit as part of the new collaboration include predictive analytics, data science and capitalising on the potential of the Internet of Things. Functions such as performance data will remain with each of the partners' authorities. It was accepted by the SRS Board that more detailed proposals and further work would need to be done to develop the case for investment in data, with a meeting of the Futures Group having taken place on 9th May to begin this work. This collaborative service will focus on enhancing frontline services, generating actionable insights from data, tailored intelligence and / or predictive analytics to support service redesign and place shaping, fostering collaboration across agencies, and developing innovative solutions to address complex challenges. The investment case will be presented to SRS Strategic Board in the first instance before being subject to a decision by Cabinet.
- 3.9 Torfaen and Blaenau Gwent will each be transferring one member of staff from day one. Monmouthshire does not have sufficient data staff to be able to do this without stopping core functions. A new data post will be created to ensure that Monmouthshire is able to participate fully in, and capitalise from, the embryonic data service from day one alongside the other two authorities. This is covered in the recommendations and resource requirements of this paper and means that partners can begin collaborating on shared data priorities as soon as possible.
- 3.10 Monmouthshire's small Geographic Information Systems (GIS) team manage the council's geospatial infrastructure and data, administering MonMaps for Staff, Local Info for Residents and providing geospatial analysis across the council. The team serves as the custodians of the Local Land and Property Gazetteer and Local Street Gazetteer, which are the council's authoritative address and street databases. The team is presently part of a shared arrangement with Newport. As Newport are not presently intending to join the full collaboration, further work will need to be completed before reaching a decision on the location of GIS Services, to ensure we do not lose the benefits of existing collaborative working.
- 3.11 The first phase of the proposal would see Monmouthshire's Digital Team join the collaboration, with the intention to transfer to the new employer, subject to consultation, no later than 1st April 2026. This would be done in accordance with The Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 2006. Meetings, including with trade unions, have been held with those staff who will be affected.
- 3.12 Appendix one of this report shows a timeline of key activity and decision points along with a summary of the functions within each of the service areas that were considered by the

Futures Group. Appendix 2 is a copy of the paper presented to the SRS Strategic Board in January 2025.

- 3.13 It is vital to ensure that the SRS can be held to account for delivery of the ambitions of the Council, and commitments set in the Community and Corporate Plan and Digital and Data Strategy. Officers will undertake a review of client-side governance to ensure that existing arrangements overseeing the delivery of the technology service are re-purposed to oversee and ensure accountability of the wider collaboration.

4. EQUALITY AND FUTURE GENERATIONS EVALUATION (INCLUDES SOCIAL JUSTICE, SAFEGUARDING AND CORPORATE PARENTING):

- 4.1 Improving use of digital and data creates the opportunity to improve our understanding of inequalities within our communities by creating access to more granular and timely data and creating the potential to combine datasets improving insights that can be used to make better decisions. For example, this will enable the acceleration of work to put in place a single view of vulnerable individuals that can be shared by partners to improve safeguarding.
- 4.2 By aligning with the five ways of working, the proposal in the background paper demonstrates a commitment to the principles of the Well-being of Future Generations Act.

5. OPTIONS APPRAISAL

- 5.1 A set of criteria were developed to identify which components of the digital, data and information governance could sit as part of a collaborative model. Options were identified:
1. No change – Business as usual
 2. Share all services (subject to a more detailed investment where required)
 3. Share digital services only
 4. Share data services only (subject to a more detailed investment case for data)
 5. Share information governance services only
 6. Share information security services only
 7. Share a bespoke combination of options 2-6

- 5.2 The recommendation is to pursue option 7, above. This includes:
- Monmouthshire's digital service becoming part of the collaborative arrangement with SRS.
 - Some data functions, as identified in paragraph 3.8 becoming part of the collaborative arrangement with a further investment case to be developed.
 - Information governance services would remain outside the collaboration. Monmouthshire CC would need to retain the legal responsibility for information governance.

There was no desire from any partners for services such as freedom of information requests and subject access requests to transfer, making it difficult to split the function effectively. However, MCC will collaborate with the other partners on information governance training.

- 5.3 A recommendation on information security services could not be taken at this point as further work needs to be done to understand the potential for collaboration
- 5.3 Sharing data services from the outset will necessitate an upfront financial contribution from Monmouthshire. Torfaen CBC and Blaenau Gwent CBC will each transfer one member of their data teams to the collaboration from the outset, pending the development of the full investment case. Monmouthshire's data capacity is part of its performance management team and the authority would be unable to transfer a member of staff. Consequently, this paper contains a recommendation to commit funds to equal to the staffing being transferred in by the other two partners.

6. EVALUATION CRITERIA

- 6.1 The criteria used as part of the initial work can be used to determine whether the collaboration has achieved what it set out to do. These include: Increased ability to prioritise resources to work at pace; increased resilience; avoid/reduce duplication, deliver cost savings.

7. REASONS:

- 7.1 To optimise the authority's digital and data functions to generate economies of scale, deliver organisational efficiencies and enhanced experiences for residents and businesses.
- 7.2 The proposals will also see the authority increase its ability to unlock the power of its data, generating insights about people and communities that provide actionable insights and enabling the development of preventative services that improve outcomes and reduce inequalities within and between communities and groups of people.

8. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

- 8.1 The net increase in expenditure as a result of the recommendations is £77,017. It is recommended that this is funded from the ICT reserve in year one of the arrangement. For year 2 (2026/27) onwards consideration will be given to incorporating the additional costs as a budget pressure or funding from existing departmental budgets should cashable efficiency savings be generated from the collaboration.
- 8.2 The first phase of the proposal would see existing digital staff transfer to the SRS no later than 1st April 2026. The combined salary cost for those transferring, coupled with Monmouthshire County Council's share of joint management costs, would be £370,273 over a full year which is higher than the current digital team budget of £346,000 necessitating an additional contribution of £24,273
- 8.3 Sharing digital services allows us to optimise our resources, reducing duplication and maximising the impact of our existing investments, to meet the authority's ambition. This efficiency means we can reduce duplication across the partners and redirect savings

towards other critical areas, enhancing overall service delivery and leading to improved outcomes without the need for additional investment in digital services.

- 8.3 Monmouthshire County Council's data team are also responsible for its performance and strategic risk management arrangements. These functions are not within the scope of the new shared service model. The other authorities will each transfer one full time equivalent (FTE) data analyst post from day one. Monmouthshire is unable to release this capacity without forgoing its ability to deliver on core work. It is therefore necessary for MCC to make a financial contribution to enable one data officer to be recruited from day one to equal the staffing contribution of the other partners. Including on costs this will result in *additional expenditure* of £52,744 inclusive of on-costs for a full year. A full investment case for data will be brought forward at a later date and will be presented to the SRS Board in the first instance.
- 8.4 The new collaboration will enable the partners to improve service delivery, generating efficiency improvements through automation and the use of artificial intelligence. It will also enable data sharing and the development of predictive analytics that will enable the development of preventative approaches that will reduce the cost of future service delivery. At present, the financial benefits cannot be estimated with any degree of certainty.
- 8.5 The software needed to link and match datasets across departments and partner organisations is presently being met from core SRS budgets. Any additional funding required will be subject to future decisions of the SRS Board or partner organisations as appropriate.

9. CONSULTEES:

Cabinet
Strategic Leadership Team
Head of HR
SRS Strategic Board
Local Partnerships (a consultancy jointly owned by the Local Government Association, HM Treasury and Welsh Government)
Responsible Chief Officers and Heads of Service at partner organisations
Chief Operating Officer, SRS
Deputy Chief Operating Officer, SRS
Unison

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS:

SRS Futures Base Paper (July 2024) – included as appendix 2

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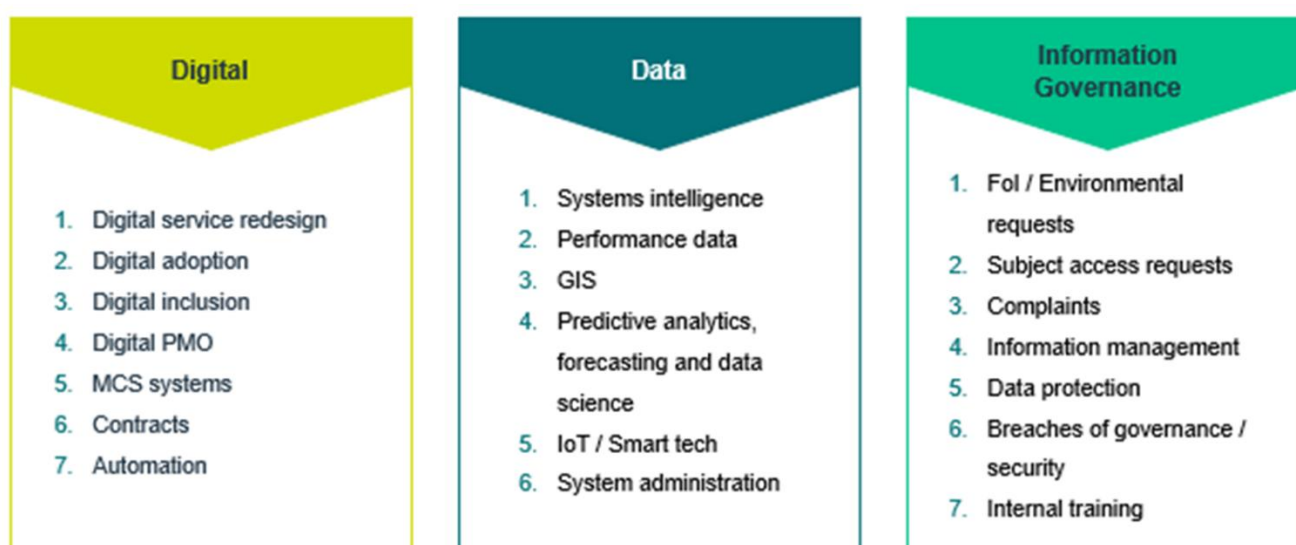
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Timeline of key activity and decision points

July 2024	SRS Strategic Board agreed move towards a shared DDaT model.
Aug	Futures Group Formed
Sept/Oct	Discovery Days
Dec	Options Workshops
Jan 2025	Paper and recommendations presented to SRS Strategic Board
April / May	Proposals presented to Cabinets of MCC, BGCBC and TCBC
Mar / April	Staff consultation and trade union consultation (digital)
May	Work begins on developing an investment case for investment in data
August	Digital Service moves to shadow arrangement
Tbc	Embryonic data service brought together (no MCC staff transferring at this stage)
Tbc	Discovery work for joint information security service
Apr 2026	Final data by which all staff within scope will have transferred to SRS

Service Area Functions examined by Futures Group



For Monmouthshire

- All seven of the defined digital functions are “in scope”.
- Four of the six data functions are “in scope”. The two functions “out of scope” are performance reporting and the system ownership function. Geographical Information Systems (GIS) are subject to ongoing discussions as MCC is already in a partnership arrangement with Newport City Council.
- One of the seven defined information governance functions are “in scope”. This is the internal training function.