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Technology Review Feedback

Vale of Glamorgan Council

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Summary report

1. Effective use of technology is essential for transforming the delivery of public services, improving outcomes for citizens and delivering efficiency savings. Technology can support different ways of working, delivering services and engaging with citizens, enabling councils to deliver more for less. The way in which technology is delivered and managed has a direct impact on the efficiency, effectiveness and quality of work undertaken across the council and affects almost every council worker. Poor ICT governance can lead to the use of inappropriate systems, system unavailability and frustration throughout the organisation.
2. In 2010, the Wales Audit Office identified that many local authorities were grappling with ensuring technology was used effectively to support service transformation and achieve efficiency savings, and as a result, reviews of technology are being undertaken at all councils in Wales.
3. This review sought to answer the question:
'Are the Council's arrangements for developing, using and supporting technology likely to support continuous improvement?'
Our review of the Vale of Glamorgan County Council (the Council) concluded that **the Council's current arrangements for developing, using and supporting technology are likely to support continuous improvement** because:
 - the Council has established sound technology foundations and ICT governance arrangements and is using technology to secure sustainable, effective use of technology, deliver efficiencies and to transform service delivery;
 - arrangements are sound but the Council could make better use of limited ICT skills and resources; and
 - performance is good, with evidence of sustainable service improvement, there is scope to better use performance information relating to the take-up and use of the Council's different customer access channels to inform and drive further improvement.
4. Our findings, conclusions, and proposals for improvement are outlined in the table below.

High-level questions and findings

High-level question	Are the Council's arrangements for developing, using and supporting technology likely to support continuous improvement?
High-level answer: We have concluded that:	The Council's current arrangements for developing, using and supporting technology are likely to support continuous improvement. The Council has established sound technology foundations and ICT governance arrangements and is using technology to secure sustainable, effective use of technology, deliver efficiencies and transform service delivery.
Assessment of current arrangements	Arrangements are sound, but the Council could make better use of limited ICT skills and resources.
Assessment of performance	Performance is good, with evidence of sustainable service improvement, there is scope to improve the customer access channel arrangements through the use of performance information.
Proposals for improvement	<p>P1 Revise the ICT Strategy to reflect how plans to use technology will support the delivery of the Council's Improvement Objectives and the expected outcomes.</p> <p>P2 The Council aligns its transformation ambitions with its capacity and skills to develop, support and deliver project-based technology without impacting on the quality of the ICT service provided.</p> <p>P3 Make better use of the Council's ICT skills, expertise and capacity either by, merging Education ICT with the Corporate ICT team, or establishing professional accountability to the Head of ICT to align and develop ICT capacity, skills and professional standards with the delivery of Council priorities.</p> <p>P4 The annual IT service plans submitted by services to the ICT Service to inform their work plans are an example of good practice, however, compliance with this process requirement needs to be addressed because only six out of a possible twenty two service plans have been submitted for 2011-12 .</p> <p>P5 Use performance information relating to the usage and cost of transactions across different customer access channels to inform its Customer Access Strategy and reduce transaction costs.</p>

Findings	Yes or No	Because:
<p>Are the Council's technology plans likely to support its improvement priorities?</p>	<p>Yes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council's ICT Strategy 2010-2014 supports and underpins the organisation's improvement objectives and aligns with the Welsh National ICT Strategy. It was developed by the Head of ICT in consultation with Heads of Service, and is underpinned by an implementation plan; both are reviewed on an annual basis. The Strategy was endorsed by the Corporate Management Team (CMT) and Cabinet at the end of 2010 following which the Head of ICT and Senior ICT Officers (Account Managers) met all Heads of Service to discuss implications for the service area. Whilst the ICT Strategy does not explicitly link to the Council's improvement objectives, and outcomes arising from the delivery of the ICT Strategy actions are not described, this detail is contained in project plans. • The Council's ICT governance arrangements support the development and exploitation of technology and underpin the organisation's improvement objectives. The One Vale Programme Board chaired by the Head of Policy and Performance, is responsible for the strategic development, oversight and delivery of the One Vale programme and has taken over the role of the Council's corporate ICT Steering Group which no longer exists. This is a high level strategic team which through close working with the CMT ensures that technology developments are business led, within a corporate framework. • The Council's basis for identifying and agreeing technology priorities is linked to available funding. The One Vale Programme has a dedicated fund and priorities are decided through the One Vale Programme Board with member involvement via the Leader. Service-based projects are discussed at the relevant Directorate Management Team (DMT) meetings where priorities are determined. If supported, a business case is developed and discussed with the Head of ICT to agree from a corporate technology and ICT Service resource perspective. Service-based projects and initiatives are dependent on one of the following funding streams, existing revenue budget, ICT Invest to Save Fund, Capital Bids or Grant funds. The decision making process for these varies, capital bids are approved by members others are approved by the relevant DMT, the Head of ICT and the Corporate Director for Resources and Property.

Findings	Yes or No	Because:
<p>Are the organisation's technology delivery arrangements likely to support continuous improvement?</p>	<p>In Part</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council engages effectively with a range of internal stakeholders when planning technology improvements informally and formally. The Head of ICT also networks effectively, internally and externally, which positively supports planning and delivery of technology. Arrangements to engage with internal stakeholders include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – two ICT Account managers regularly meet Service departments; – ICT Training is provided corporately, free of charge to encourage take up; – an ICT User Group, operational staff meet between six to eight times a year to discuss the implications and opportunities of proposed changes and initiatives, and through – membership of project teams as part of the corporate project management methodology. • Engagement with schools is not via the central ICT service, an ICT Team located in the Education department provides this function, the arrangement has not always supported effective and efficient support for schools, eg, inefficient procurement of Microsoft licences, schools were not using the Council's MS Select agreement to purchase MS Licence, missing out on significant discounts for licences used for educational purposes. • In developing plans to deliver technology improvement, the Council evaluates and considers opportunities for collaboration and partnership. The framework used to evaluate collaboration are <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – risks of not collaborating; – benefits arising from collaboration; – impact on the Customer (which must be better not worse); and – savings. • Memorandums of understanding with both Bridgend and Swansea Councils are in place. With: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Bridgend to support a formal approach to working together to deliver improved value for money and improved outcomes for the residents of Bridgend and the Vale; and with – Swansea City Council to explore the mutual benefits, risks, issues and potential costs of a future shared Oracle e-Business Suite delivery and the applicability of such a delivery model to the wider Welsh public sector.

Findings	Yes or No	Because:
<p>Are the organisation's technology delivery arrangements likely to support continuous improvement?</p>	<p>In Part</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council's policies and standards clearly outline how technology is to be deployed, used and exploited by the organisation. Technology standards are documented in the ICT Strategy. The ICT Computer Code of Practice was developed and agreed via working groups which included Internal Audit, HR and Legal and Business Services and CMT. • The Council is managing the growth in demand for technology but current arrangements are likely to impact on the future quality of ICT service provision as demands increase and the Council's technical skills and experience are not retained. The Council accepts that investment in technology can help it achieve service transformation and efficiencies, the One Vale programme has its own fund which is replenished from savings and efficiencies achieved through the programme. The Council has a three-to four-year financial strategy and over that period the revenue budget cuts for the ICT Service will be the same as for the rest of the Council. In the last 12 months the ICT service has reduced the number of staff by 10 per cent as a result of restructures. The negative impact on 70 per cent of the ICT Service staff of job evaluation is impacting on the recruitment and retention of key technical skills. In addition, new customer access channels and flexible working arrangements mean that technology has to be available for longer periods, some such as the web need to be available continuously, which impacts on technology support arrangements, which currently only cover normal office hours. • Technology plans have clear and robust links with financial plans, staff/skills resource plans are less clear. Technology refresh plans feed into the Asset Management Strategy Group. • As part of the Annual Service planning process, services are asked by the ICT service to outline their technology plans for the year ahead to enable resource requirements and team plans to be developed, however, for 2012-13, only six out of twenty two service plans were received by the ICT service. The Head of ICT and the Director of Finance, ICT and Property align ICT skills, expertise and resources with the One Vale programme, service-based projects, ICT support and ICT improvements, any conflicts that cannot be resolved are referred to CMT.

Findings	Yes or No	Because:
Are the organisation's technology delivery arrangements likely to support continuous improvement?	In Part	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council is effectively managing technology risks. The Head of ICT is responsible for ICT risks which are reported using the Council's corporate risk management and business planning arrangements. Risks are also reported through project governance structures. • Technology is delivered using sound corporate programme and project management arrangements. • The Council is effectively managing its ICT assets.
Is the Council using technology as an enabler for transformation and achieving substantial savings on running costs?	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council actively uses technology to increase the ways in which all citizens are able to engage and interact with it. The objective of the Council's Contact Channel Strategy 2010 is to maintain customer choice while minimising transaction costs to the authority and covers all current and future external customer contact points across all services. Customer access channels in place or planned within the next year are; web; email; forms; telephone; face-to-face, SMS; land-mail; mobile/smart-phones; kiosks; Digital TV; social networking; email. Each individual channel has its own set of objectives, strategic actions and short-term actions. The Operational Manager – Customer Relations reports directly to the Chief Executive and is responsible and accountable for all customer access channels. The Council markets online services to the public using Customer Service Representatives, leaflets, letters, posters, local radio, website banners and having the web address on Council vehicles. A marketing plan is being developed which will inform target customer groups of the advantages of using the website and encourage its use as the preferred contact channel for interacting with the Council. • Telephone contact is the most used customer access channel; the call centre operates a single contact number. Face-to-face contact is provided within reception areas in existing offices, dealing with a small range of services, enquiries are not recorded and the Council's own evaluation has identified that the level of customer service provided by staff can be inconsistent, this is being improved by the Customer Access Group. The Council's website is highly rated in external evaluations.

Findings	Yes or No	Because:
<p>Is the Council using technology as an enabler for transformation and achieving substantial savings on running costs?</p>	<p>Yes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technology is used to support social inclusion, the Council's website offers a choice of English and Welsh and can be accessed by a range of devices such as i phones, Androids, and Wii to encourage take-up. It is AAA compliant; the highest level of accessibility compliance a website can achieve making it accessible for people with disabilities. The Council's WIMAX project will promote digital inclusion; plans include offering Wifi connectivity as part of Tenancy agreements, offering Wifi connectivity to private businesses and homes for a fee which is used to fund the provision. • The Council migrated from the traditional server based storage to Storage Area Network (SAN) technology several years ago, SANs are located on three sites providing resilience and redundancy, data is replicated every ten minutes. The SANs store the Council's core Data, ie, Oracle, ERP, CRM and Trim Document Management system. Local file and print servers provide network drive letter storage. • The electronic document management system, Trim, is being rolled out (currently 250,000 documents) and should be used to store all documents. Group policies default the document save location to Trim but this is not enforced. • The Council is planning to increase its use of technology to introduce more flexibility in how employees are empowered and enabled to work, at home, on site, or in customers' homes. It is formalising a 'smarter working policy' to manage a more mobile workforce. As part of the Space project a corporate approach is going to strengthen the move towards more home working. Remote access is available to staff from locations such as Bridgend Council and the Local Health Board. Mobile applications are used, eg, Social Services use Smart pens which save social workers two hours a day typing up notes. All buildings have wireless connectivity and hot desking facilities. A few staff are full-time home workers; approximately two hundred staff are ad hoc home working. Home working technology has been used to enable people, unable to travel, to work from home, reducing sickness absence. Staff can use soft phones linked to laptops and desk top VC technology to communicate. All Elected Members have a laptop and a Business broadband connection and access to all relevant Council systems from home including e-mail and Ffynnon.

Findings	Yes or No	Because:
<p>Is the Council using technology as an enabler for transformation and achieving substantial savings on running costs?</p>	<p>Yes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Three years ago the Council implemented its 'Print Strategy; a centrally managed printing service to reduce printing costs and support overheads. Five of the Council's main buildings have Multi Functional Devices (MFDs) capable of high quality printing, scanning and photocopying. In 2012 the contract will be renewed and enhanced, extending it to remote offices, libraries and aligning this with the TRIM project to use the scanning technology available in the MFDs. • Several years ago the Council invested in the Oracle Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) e-business suite and is now starting to realise its benefits from consolidating applications wherever possible, maximising the investment in the Oracle ERP system. A Business Process Reengineering (BPR) review of the Council's housing systems is being undertaken, looking at the potential to use the Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system to record requests for housing repairs. The Head of ICT is proactively renegotiating contracts and looking to rationalise maintenance contracts to reduce costs. • The Council has a well-established, centralised ICT infrastructure which has been standardised and simplified to ensure it is secure and always available and to reduce support overheads. The Council has a Public Sector Broadband (PSBA) network connection but is not migrating its Council's Wide Area Network (WAN) to the PSBA; it was not cost effective to do so. • The BPR Team is working with service areas and the ICT service to improve business processes using technology to fundamentally rethink how services are delivered in order to improve customer service and cut costs through the use of Oracle ERP. Online payslips and expenses have been implemented for all desk-based staff but not manual workers and schools. HR self service is to be implemented in 2012 once the Council has migrated to Oracle R12. Online procurement has been implemented but not yet rolled out to all departments. • The Council is fully committed to green ICT.

Findings	Yes or No	Because:
<p>Is the Council's effectively monitoring and evaluating technology improvement and performance?</p>	<p>In Part</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council collects, reviews, evaluates and reports on a range of technology performance information. ICT Service information is reported through the Ffynnon performance management system quarterly. Technology performance and project progress against plans is reported quarterly to the One Vale Programme Board Performance Board. Recently the Council participated in the Local Government Future Forums Customer Satisfaction survey; results from the recent survey indicate high levels of satisfaction from internal users of the ICT service. The Council has used SOCITM benchmarking services in the past using the analysis to compare its performance against Wales and the UK but no longer does this because of the cost. • The Council learns from monitoring, reviewing and evaluation of its performance through 'its lessons learnt' reviews eg, Internal Audit collaboration with Bridgend lessons were learnt about the provision of network and system access for staff across both organisations. Post project reviews are routinely carried out, being part of the corporate project management methodology. An example of learning from monitoring, reviewing and evaluating is: as a result of reviewing the low take-up of ICT training and analysis of service desk information, changes have been implemented to increase ICT training take-up to improve ICT competence levels and reduce ICT support overheads. • The Council learns from others, sharing experience and learning to promote improvement through Society of IT Managers (SOCITM) meetings, questionnaires to other authorities, working with others in the public sector and the private sector. • The Council records some basic channel access information but has not undertaken research into the volumes of use and associated costs of transactions across each customer access channel. It is not yet reviewing and monitoring its different channel use and assessing the impact and savings. The percentage of the total transactions delivered by each channel is not measured. Channel costs have not been calculated specifically for the Vale, although this is an action for 2011-12.

Findings	Yes or No	Because:
<p>Is the Council effectively monitoring and evaluating technology improvement and performance?</p>	<p>In Part</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Corporate Resources Scrutiny Committee is responsible for technology. Quarterly performance monitoring reports based upon SOCITM performance indicators are the only reports that have been considered by Scrutiny since January 2009. A more rounded picture of what scrutiny might look at could include: customer access statistics and plans to introduce channel shift and reasons, and proposed efficiency savings such as mobile working and how this impacts on service delivery and supports other council plans eg, accommodation. • The portfolio holder for ICT is also Leader of the Council; he does not regularly meet the Head of ICT but attends three out of four CMT meetings, which gives him some insight into significant technology issues and opportunities. The members' scrutiny agenda is determined by scrutiny members and has not included any technology-based issues such as the Council's decision not to follow the Welsh National Strategy to migrate the WAN to the PSBA. • A members' ICT working group has been established, quarterly meetings are held and all members are invited to attend. Meetings tend to focus on member ICT-related issues rather than strategic opportunities and issues. Attendance is poor, ranging from between 6 to 12 members out of 47.



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