Digital progress in local government

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AUDIT SCOTLAND

Introduction

Digital progress in local government

ACCOUNTS COMMISSION

Prepared by Audit Scotland
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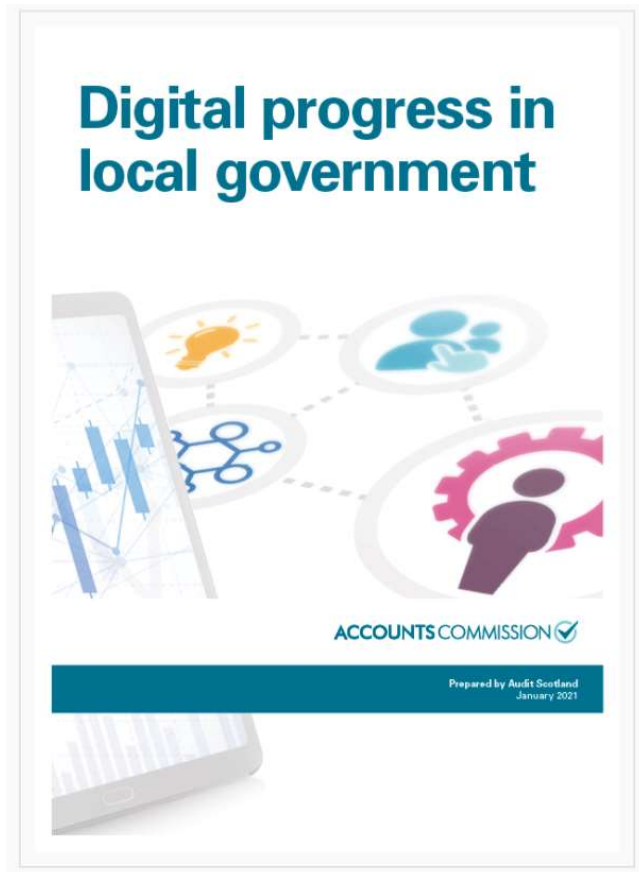
Aims of the audit

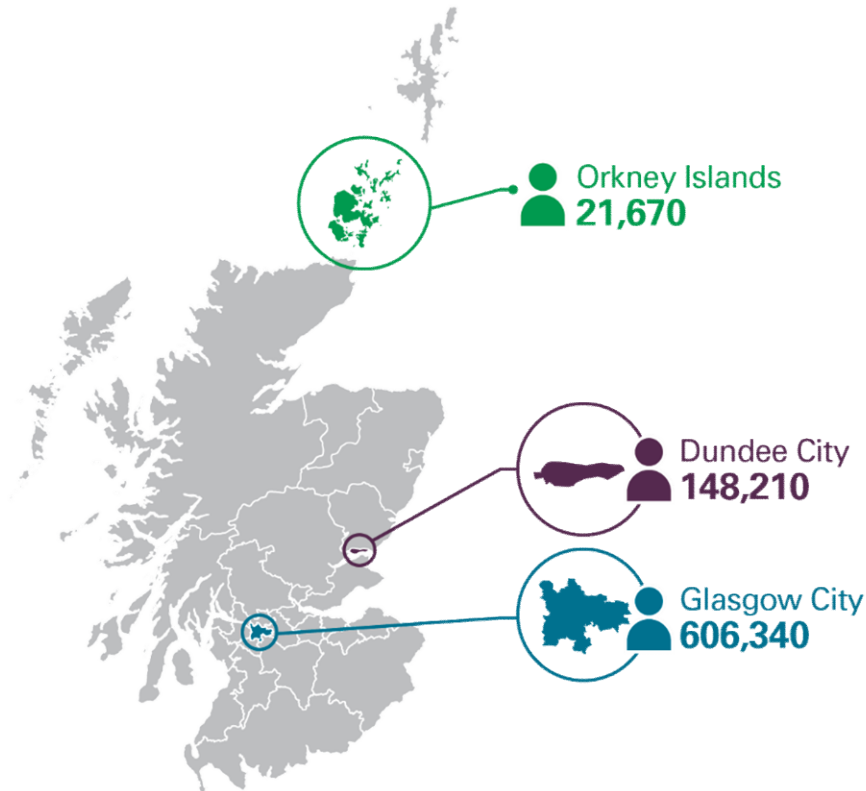Methodology and challenges

Findings and recommendations

Resources

Scottish Councils

32 councils:

🏢 6 cities

📍 3 islands

Local Government Digital Office works in partnerships with councils to help drive digital transformation across the country.

Orkney Islands
21,670

Dundee City
148,210

Glasgow City
606,340

Significant differences in terms of:

💼 deprivation

🌿 rurality

👥 population profiles

Aims of the report

Help councils improve and make progress with digital transformation

- o set out the key characteristics of a digital council
- o make recommendations
- o provide additional resources – Checklist for elected members and Good Practice Guide

Used a sample of 6 councils to:

- o outline how well councils are putting in place the building blocks to becoming a digital council
- o provide examples that demonstrate how some councils are transforming
- o examine the common barriers to progress
- o examine how councils have used digital technology to respond to the Covid-19 pandemic and what can be learned from this

Aimed at senior management within councils and elected members.

Methodology and challenges

- Digital maturity differs across councils and they have varied levels of historic and current investment. Therefore difficult to give national picture

- No common data sets, needed to rely on qualitative data and in-depth fieldwork

- Needed to use a sample of councils, had to be as representative as possible

- Everyone has a different definition of what digital means and includes, therefore not always easy to find the right people to talk to

- Very difficult to 'follow the money': how do you separate out routine IT spending from digital transformation/innovation

- We had good relationships with key people in the sector – needed to use these to highlight the value of the audit and to ensure that the recommendations would be useful and implemented

Key characteristics of a digital council

A digital council is focused on delivering better outcomes for its citizens through the best use of people and digital technology. Having the right skills and culture in place is critical and underpins each of these characteristics:

Digital leadership

Communicates a clear digital vision and ambition and creates an innovative and collaborative culture that drives change. Understands the potential of people and digital technologies to transform services for citizens.

User focused

Understands the needs of citizens, communities and staff affected by services and policies, and involves them in service design. Focuses on improving outcomes for citizens and other users.

Digital workforce

Has the skills, knowledge and confidence to develop new ways of working, including using new technology.

Collaborative

Develops new ways of working together, sharing good practice and ideas across services and between councils and sectors, and involves citizens and communities.

Technology & data enabled

Makes best use of digital technology to build common solutions, that can be reused and shared to create better value for money. Uses and shares data securely to inform decision-making, enable joint services and achieve better outcomes for citizens.

Innovative

Has a culture of openness and improvement, looks outwards and explores how services can be delivered differently. Has the capacity, capability and processes in place to implement change.

Key findings and recommendations

Digital leadership

- Leaders driving digital vision and engaging staff

- Sufficient digital awareness, expertise and skills

- Elected members involved – not well developed

- Right level of scrutiny

- Invested in people and skills as well as technology

- Outcomes focused strategy

Recommendations: Have outcome focused digital vision and strategy. Supported by plans detailing timescales, actions and required investment in technology, people and skills

User focused

- Involve users in service design – limited in practice

- Ensure no one is left behind. Covid-19 has heightened awareness of digital exclusion

- Improve how outcomes are monitored

Recommendations: Have engagement plan to better understand needs of citizens. Have staff with sufficient skills to carry out service design. Identify and address inequalities and digital exclusion. Improve how outcomes are monitored eg a benefits realisation approach

Digital workforce

- Insufficient staff capacity and digital skills significant barriers

- Build capacity through digital skills initiatives

- External partners can accelerate transformation but in-house expertise still needed

- Improve workforce planning

Recommendations: Conduct skills survey to better understand digital and data skills they have/need. Have detailed workforce and skills development plans, for all levels, that align with digital transformation plans

Technology and data enabled

- Address legacy systems and improve technical architecture

- Focus on making better use of data

- Put data governance frameworks in place

Recommendations: Understand infrastructure and have plan to address legacy systems. Consider common platforms and shared procurement. Work with Digital Office and SG in developing common data standards and ethics.

Innovative

- Early stage of developing the shared digital culture but Covid-19 has stimulated a culture of innovation

- Staff need space and time to innovate – leadership have key role in setting the tone

- Different approaches to support innovation eg agile, but shortage of these skills

Recommendations: Have a structured approach to innovation, give staff time and space to learn, test new ideas and put them into practice. Take stock of progress, lessons learned as move into phase of renewal

Collaborative

- Greater collaboration, shared learning and common digital solutions needed within councils, between councils and with local, regional and cross-sectoral partners

- Digital Office has helped councils, collaborate, share knowledge and innovate

- Opportunities exist for Digital Office to do more - requires changes to how it works, how councils support it and how it is funded.

Recommendations: Have a structured approach to collaboration, give staff time and space. Actively collaborate through the Digital Office and other regional partnerships

Collaborative - national

- Greater collaborative leadership and clarity of roles at a national level is needed

- Refreshed digital strategy for Scotland an opportunity to set out a shared vision and priorities across the sector

Recommendations:
- Agree on and articulate roles and responsibilities
- Identify where a shared approach would add value to developing and delivering common systems and platforms, and specialist skills
- Review funding and delivery model for the Digital Office, to ensure it has the capacity and support to deliver on the agreed priorities
- Streamline Digital Office work programme, with each part of the programme having senior-level sponsorship

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Covid-19 digital response

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Helped develop digital leadership and moved digital transformation up councils' agendas

Increased the focus on service users and the awareness of the risks of digital exclusion

Changed how and where people work and councils have adapted well to support their workforce

Brought greater collaboration across sectors as priorities and goals have become clearer and more aligned

Demonstrated the importance of data in understanding needs, making decisions and directing resources

Encouraged a culture of innovation that councils need to further develop as they move into a phase of renewal

Resources

Good practice guide

Checklist for elected members

More resources on the digital e-hub:

www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/reports/e-hubs/digital-e-hub

Key messages animation

Questions