The Highland Council	**Agenda Item** 12(b)
Resources Committee 23rd November 2016	**Report No** RES/ 79/16

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Mobile Service Delivery Project

Report by Depute Chief Executive/Director Corporate Development

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Summary

This report provides an update on the progress of the Mobile Service Delivery project and benefits realised to date, and includes a case study to provide the Committee with an insight to how this work benefits the Council and its customers.

1. Background

1.1 The Corporate Improvement Team project is providing front line staff with mobile devices, with access to up to date information to enable a more responsive and cost effective service to our customers. The initial project within Housing Repairs has mobilised 50 Officers (Electricians, Joiners, Plumbers, Painters and Labourers) and has seen significant gains in productivity in excess of 20%, reducing our costs and delivering savings.

1.2 Through the application of mobile technology, the project is designing and delivering solutions for improved service delivery at reduced cost through focussing on what is important to meeting the customer need, removing work and bureaucracy that adds no or little value. The Project not only improves the customer experience, it also provides for improved working conditions and practices for our employees, whilst reducing cost.

1.3 The project is targeted to make £512,000 of savings over the three years duration of the work. In the first year, £40,000 savings were taken, and the programme is on track to make a saving of £344,000 within this current financial year. This will result in a 100% return on the initial investment within a year from system launch. The savings are a direct result of workload reduction through process redesign and a reduction of work being passed to subcontractors.

1.4 This project is working closely with the Digital First Programme, ensuring effective and efficient processes for customers and staff alike, from notification through to completion. The case study within this report highlights where these linkages have been made to deliver benefits between the individual projects to enhance customer experience.

1.5 The project will establish 325 mobile workers over the next 12 months across all services, with the solutions supporting consistent levels of service delivery across the Highlands.

1.6 The adoption of mobile technology by front line staff delivers a range of benefits to the Council and to our Customers, and the following provides Committee with an outline of these.

1.7   Benefits to Customers

- Reduction in job delays/cancellations.
- Customers receive more accurate information around changes to appointments.
- Improved value for money and quality of delivery through the reduction in use of subcontractors.
- Mobile Operators are more responsive to Customers' needs while on site.
- Mobile Operators are able to facilitate wider digital inclusion.
- Customers are able to interact with tablet devices to ensure the experience is more participatory.
- Customer data protection is enhanced in comparison to the use of paper records.

1.8   Benefits to the council

- Councils services are modernised
- Delivering £512,000 of savings
- Time dedicated to front line services is maximised, through increased productivity and reduced travel time
- Process automation and streamlining acts to reduce wasted effort
- Stable mobile delivery platform which is provides constant levels of system availability for Operational Services.
- Information is captured during the visit, reducing the requirement to use a fixed office computer.
- Information capture can be standardised to remove Operator variability.
- Increased automation with back office systems is reducing the need for manual data entry.
- Elimination of the use of paper folders and associated printing costs
- Reduction in handling and storage of paper forms.
- Officers are able to take advantage of applications available on Tablets/Smartphone devices (i.e. Satellite Navigation).

2   Progress to Date

2.1   Delivered Projects

2.1.1   Housing Repairs

The initial Project within Housing Repairs mobilised 50 workers across all Highland Council areas. The solution is constant across all areas to ensure that a tenant in Caithness enjoys the same levels of service as a tenant in Inverness. The solution provides Operatives with a mechanism for the recording of materials used, reporting of Health and Safety incidents and requesting approval for jobs which require high levels of material spend. Since the launch, our staff are attending more appointments, and spending more productive time with Customers. This has resulted in a corresponding reduction in the use of subcontracted work.

2.1.2   Planning/Building Standards

The second initiative was launched on August 24th 2016, mobilising 60 Planning and Building Standards staff. Their solution provides staff with Tablet devices, enabling them to take digital copies of documents and capture updates when at the customer site. The solution has resulted in an avoidance of increased printing costs (estimated at £50,000+). Future improvements will further integrate this solution back into the

planning system so as to minimise the amount of time officers need to be based from an office location.

2.2   Staff Feedback

The Programme has put in place the facility to allow staff to feedback anonymously at any time, and this direct feedback has resulted in improvements. For example one of our Housing Repairs Operators was delighted that his suggestion had been implemented within 3 days of the feedback being raised. Where suggestions cannot be implemented (due to costs, policy or technical feasibility) feedback is always provided to indicate the reasons why. This feedback loop acts to give staff a higher level of ownership of their system.

2.3   Staff Training

Staff have varying degrees of experience with using modern smartphone/tablet devices, and the Programme continues to provide a tailored approach to training, working closely with staff to ensure that those that need more time on training are identified and offered extra support, whilst those with high degrees of experience using modern devices, not being required to attend repeated training.

2.4   Service Reliability

The system has enjoyed very high levels of reliability since launch with no breaks in service. Front line operators need the ability to access information without having to visit an office location (and so reducing travel time). The reliability of the system has also corresponded directly to a reduction in the number of appointments cancelled, providing an improved service for our customers.

2.5   Reduction in printing costs

Building Standards and Planning were anticipating an annual rise in printing costs of £50,000 per annum with the introduction of the new EBuilding Standards online service. These costs were avoided by having a mobile solution in place that allows Officers to take digital version of documents with them to customer visits.

3   Case Study: The Welfare Team (launching December 2016)

3.1   The programme identified that the welfare team were visiting customers without ready access to information required to effectively assess and this was leading to resolve Customers' requests during an appointment.   Mobile Welfare officers will improve the customer experience in the following ways:
- Customer requests can be solved during the visit
- Officers can assist customers with online applications for the following Council entitlement s and benefits:
  - Housing benefit and council tax reduction
  - Free school meals and assistance with school clothing
  - Council tax discounts and exemptions
  - Second adult rebate
  - Disabled Band Reduction
  - Discretionary housing payments
  - Garden aid
  - Free parking permits

- Officers can assist Customers with online applications for external benefits and entitlements (i.e. Child Benefit, Pensions, etc.)
- Customers will be able to view materials that have been produced to aid Digital Inclusion
- Officers will be able to spend more time with Customers as there is less reliance on returning to an office location to access information

3.2 Welfare Officers will use tablet devices that are easy to carry and are connected to offer an improved service when visiting customers, with capability for secured private and sensitive information whilst sharing their device with Customers.

4   Next Steps

4.1 Included in the implementation plan are the following areas of service delivery where improved customer service, better use of resource, and reduced costs will be delivered:
- **Housing Repairs Phase 2** (e.g. improved ability to be flexible and responsive in deploying repairs staff between Voids and day to day repairs)
- **Planning and Building Standards** (e.g. ability to take digital copies of Plans and Case documents to customer visits)
- **Welfare Team** (e.g. ready and secure access to information when meeting with Customers away from the office)
- **Community Works** (e.g. capture information on required pothole repairs, to include the location of the repair, a photo and information on the type of repair, reducing exposure to potential Council liabilities through timeous repairs)
- **Commercial Maintenance** (e.g. operatives will be able to carry out inspections and other related tasks on devices, without the need to return to an office location)
- **Grass Cutting** (e.g. solution developed for the effective and efficient inspection of grass cutting areas)

4.2 Through delivering across the targeted service areas, the project will enable 325 mobile workers. However, the demand for mobile delivery is likely to continue to increase, and there is an emerging case for securing a wider licence.

5   Risks

5.1 In progressing all projects and initiatives, the Corporate Improvement Team apply and maintain a risk and issue management method, balancing risk awareness and management with a focus on confidently trying new ways of working and learning from this.

6   Resource Implications

6.1 The programme is due to make £512,000 of savings over the four years of the project. In the first year, £40,000 worth of savings were achieved, and the programme is on track to make a saving of £344,000 within this Financial Year. The overall investment was less than £300,000 meaning that the programme will secure a 100% return on investment within 12 months of launch.

7   Legal Implications

7.1   There are no current or anticipated legal implications

8   Equalities and Rural Implications

8.1   Mobile Services can be delivered in the same way within rural areas as they are within Inverness. The solution is flexible enough to work in an offline mode to ensure that information can be captured on devices in areas with no data signal. Information is stored and uploaded whenever a connection becomes available.

8.2   The Welfare Team will be able to provide an enhanced service to Customers through the adoption of mobile devices. Previously they were unable to access all of the information that can be used assist customers with welfare applications on site. Their new solution will enable access to MyAccount so that customers can set up a single account to access a range of online services. Their devices will also include all of the self-help videos that have been developed by the Digital First Programme to enhance Digital Inclusion.

9   Climate Change / Carbon Clever Implications

9.1   The use of mobile technology can support the reduction in printing costs and use of paper forms. Mobile working can also reduce the need for vehicle journeys by reducing the requirement for repeated visits to an office location.

10   Gaelic Implications

10.1   There are no current or anticipated Gaelic implications.

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11   Recommendations

11.1   Members are asked to note progress made and benefits delivered to date by the Mobile Service Delivery project.

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Date: 02/11/16
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