

Report to:	Performance, Assets and Strategy Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 3 March 2026
Lead Cabinet Member:	Councillor Simon Smith, Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources
Lead Officer:	Simon Oliver, Chief Digital and Information Officer

3C ICT Year One Audit

Executive Summary

1. The 3C ICT service is a joint service provided to Cambridge City Council (CCity), Huntingdonshire District Council (HDC) and South Cambridgeshire District Council (SCDC).
2. The service is 'sponsored' by HDC, with all staffing arrangements delivered under HDC terms and conditions, and to a Partnership Agreement, which was renewed in 2025.
3. The 3C ICT service was subject to external review in 2024. Several shortcomings were identified, and Year One Success Criteria were established against which the service would be re-evaluated against.
4. The Chief Information Digital Officer (CDIO) role was established and recruited to in December 2024, to deliver the remediation activity and improve digital innovation within the Partner Councils.
5. A CDIO360 review was undertaken in November 2025, to review the impact of the introduction of the CDIO role and performance of the postholder. Key statements from this review are included within this report.
6. As part of the ICT Remediation Programme, also known as the CDIO Programme, an internal audit was scheduled for the end of the first year, to be undertaken by HDC's external audit partner, RSM.
7. The audit report has now been released and contains two Management Actions, for which activity has been established to address.

8. This report is to be presented to each Partner Council's Oversight and Scrutiny function for awareness and comment, and ongoing review of Management Actions will be undertaken by HDC as the 'sponsor' Council for the 3C ICT service.

Recommendations

8. It is recommended that the Scrutiny Committee acknowledge the report and its contents, the Management Actions committed to, and to provide any feedback.

Details

9. During 2024, a review of the 3C ICT service was undertaken by an external professional consultancy.
10. This review identified several shortcomings with the ICT service, which were identified through independent technical and culture reviews, a customer survey, and interviews with key stakeholders.
11. Whilst a number of potential options as to how to address or remediate the ICT service were discussed across the Partner Councils, including potential change of 'sponsor' council or disaggregation/repatriation, it was agreed that the service would be set a target of one year to remediate against agreed Year One Success Criteria.
12. As part of the external review, a recommendation was the introduction of a CDIO role, to work directly as a Chief Officer to each of the Partner Councils, and to take responsibility for the 3C ICT service.
13. To support the remediation required, several activities were cost estimated. The Partner Councils committed to a £241k budget for remediation activities, and a £300k establishment budget (to include the uplift of the CDIO role), which was to be shared on an equal proportional basis between the Partner Councils.
14. The CDIO role was recruited to in December 2024.
15. The CDIO undertook a full review of the external report and conducted their own in-depth investigations during the December to January period. As a result, the CDIO Programme (Remediation Programme) was developed and agreed with the Partner Council Chief Executives (CX).
16. The CDIO Programme amalgamated all feedback, the service improvement programme activities, response to the 2024 customer survey and the Year One Success Criteria.
17. The CDIO Programme sought to deliver a much more complex, ambitious and beneficial programme of work than that originally envisioned by the external consultancy, but within the same budget envelope provisioned.

18. The ambitious nature of the CDIO Programme was always recognised, and all parties were aware that it may not be achievable based on the scale and complexity of the challenge, and the significant culture and delivery issues that were apparent.
19. However, all parties agreed that achievement of most of an ambitious programme of work was more advantageous than a full achievement of a simpler programme of work that would require further significant activity into a second year.
20. To oversee the progress of the CDIO Programme, CDIO/CX Forums were established where the CDIO and three Partner Council Chief Executives would meet to discuss the programme of work and assess successes and blockers to success. These Forums occurred in February, May, September of 2025, and January 2026.
21. In addition, all three 3C Service Directors were provided full access to the CDIO/CX Forum reports, as well as ongoing dialogue and agreement on the details of the activities within the CDIO Programme at an operational level. A Microsoft Teams Channel was used to ensure consistent communications and sharing of supporting information.
22. The CDIO Programme was split into three waves of activity to be undertaken during 2025. The first two being three months in duration, followed by one of four months duration. These were broadly split into focus areas as below;



23. As part of the CDIO Programme, an audit was to be undertaken within December 2025 to independently assess the delivery of the Year One Success Criteria.
24. The scope of the audit report, as agreed with the Partner Council Chief Executives, was to assess the Success of the CDIO Programme and achievement of the Year One Success Criteria

25. HDC's external audit partner, RSM, were provided more than 50 documents by the CDIO to support the review of the CDIO Programme. This audit was an intensive undertaking.
26. To support the audit a Customer Survey was undertaken. This was an all-staff survey repeating the questions from the 2024 survey, which was used to assess the perception of the service pre-remediation, to enable a comparison of responses.
27. The audit has identified two Management Actions to be addressed;
 - Create a revised plan for the outstanding CDIO Programme deliverables
 - Address the outputs from the 2025 ICT Customer Survey
28. A CDIO/CX Forum took place on the 2 February 2025, and the Management Actions and proposed approach was discussed.
29. The options available to the Partner Councils on the 3C ICT service have been significantly impacted by the release of the English Devolution Whitepaper (LGR) as disaggregation, repatriation and/or a change of 'sponsor' Council would introduce risk to the LGR preparation and delivery activity underway.
30. However, the overall opinion of the 3C ICT service is one of significant improvement and it is likely that the current arrangements for the 3C ICT service would have been continued regardless of the impact of LGR considerations.
31. The CDIO is keen to move the 3C ICT service out of a perception of continuing to require substantial remediation. Significant progress has been made across all functions, and as reflected in the ICT Customer Survey. The positive foundations that have been laid for future success, as reflected in the review of the CDIO Programme and the ICT Customer Survey feedback, suggest it would be appropriate to remove this term from future activity.
32. As a result, the focus of the Management Action will be to undertake as much of the continued activity within the operational 'business as usual' activity, albeit these outcomes will remain a focus for communications between the CDIO and the 3C Service Directors, and Chief Executives.
33. The Customer Survey, while a reduced number of responses in the most recent survey, has shown significant improvements across all categories and has met the Year One Success Criteria target for improvement.
34. However, reviewing the written responses to the Customer Survey question has identified key areas for improvement. These include performance issues across the Wi-Fi network, laptops and some Line of Business Applications. Also noted are the booking and usability of the Meeting Room technology, and the reliability of the provisioned docking stations in 'hot desk' areas (mostly due to cables being removed). All these issues are already within projects to address the issues which were underway prior to the Customer Survey results being released.

35. The Customer Survey also identified opportunities for further strengthening Change Delivery and Digital Delivery both within the 3C ICT team and within the Partner Councils. Work on these areas has already started and is directly under 3C Service Director review to ensure appropriate focus, with the CDIO being accountable for its delivery. Progress will be reported to this committee in a future update report.
36. The need for continued User Training has been identified as a key issue to be addressed in response to the Customer Survey. There is uncertainty as to which applications should be used, and for which purpose, and/or the full capability of the software that has been provisioned by the 3C ICT service.
37. The CDIO has provided a lunchtime learning session on using Generative AI to each Partner Council which was well received and has increased usage of tools provided; feedback is that this has raised colleague confidence. How this can be built upon across the other systems in use will be discussed with colleagues within the Partner Council Learning and Development Teams.
38. Progress with the CDIO Programme has been overall successful, despite the scope being extended within the delivery year, in response to changed ambitions and the needs of LGR. The flexibility and proactiveness of the approach have enabled LGR readiness to be accelerated where possible.
39. Some aspects of the CDIO Programme have been delayed due to unforeseen circumstances or the pragmatic scheduling of activities around evidence gathering and/or capacity constraints. An example of this is the restructure of the ICT Leadership team, which was envisioned to commence in May, but did not start until September 2025. This has now been completed with new roles being advertised, two roles being made redundant, during January 2026.
40. The CDIO Programme has been delivered on budget, with £55k being allocated prior to commencement of the CDIO. The CDIO has utilised in-year efficiency savings to offset additional license costs, and utilised Microsoft grant funding to deliver training and consultancy services. The establishment budgets have enabled redundancy costs to be covered, and to provide the necessary budgets for a revised leadership structure which was out for recruitment during January 2026.
41. The benefits of the CDIO Programme include a significant uplift in the perception of the 3C ICT service, greater preparedness for LGR and the implementation of solid technology foundations which can be built upon.
42. However, the CDIO Programme also has some missed opportunities in relation to some cultural issues that remain within some of the operational and delivery teams, and support services still receive a mixed user perception. This aligns with the 3C ICT Customer Survey outcomes and indicates there is still work to do.
43. The remaining activities of the CDIO Programme will be allocated either to Operational Activities ("Business as Usual") or the developing LGR Readiness Programme.

44. In November 2025, a CDIO360 was conducted to determine the impact of the introduction of the CDIO role, and the performance of the postholder. Feedback was sought from stakeholders within each 3C Partner Council, including the Chief Executive, the 3C Shared Service Director, a non-ICT Director, and the Transformation/PMO Lead.

45. The CDIO360 summarised that the CDIO role is already providing substantial value, particularly in alignment, communication, and leadership in digital matters.

“The creation of the role has been very positive and a step-change in the delivery of the service to the Council”

“The CDIO role has brought greater stability, structure and transparency to how digital and technology decisions are made across the partnership. It’s reassuring to have a senior lead who actively removes barriers and advocates for digital progress”

46. Respondents highlighted the CDIO’s strong blend of strategic, technical, and people leadership skills, as well as their ability to simplify complex issues and foster collaboration

“[The CDIO’s] ability to simplify complex issues, communicate with clarity, and create a sense of shared purpose across the partnership councils has added real value. He’s shown a proactive and supportive leadership style, which has helped strengthen confidence and collaboration across digital and transformation teams”

“I welcome [the CDIO’s] approach to challenging the partnership. He does it well, and I would encourage that to continue”

“I am very glad [the CDIO] has joined us, and I can see the practical differences it has already made”

“[The CDIO’s] ability to bridge the gap between technical and strategic is very apparent”

47. The CDIO360 report found that the CDIO’s broader experience in Unitary Councils has been demonstrated, and there was a broad recognition that this will be a critical leadership capability needed to support each council with their LGR journey.

48. LGR digital leadership will be an increasingly essential and time-consuming role, and survey respondents indicated that the CDIO would require increased support and capacity to provide this LGR leadership in the future.

“[The CDIO’s] proven ability to operate at the Unitary/County level has shone brightly”

“The work towards LGR will become a significant programme for us all, I welcome [the CDIO’s] work on this already and have a lot of confidence he will develop this further”

“[The CDIO] is doing an incredibly difficult, but much-needed job. He is challenging at all levels and brings balance and humour to that. He is seeking to embed Digital as a core consideration of LGR and Transformation”

49. A particular success over the past year has been the significant uplift in the relationship between the councils and the 3C ICT Shared Service. This has been driven by a change in the individuals, a new CDIO, and a reset of the ‘intelligent client’ function to the Chief Operating Officer, along with a more open and transparent approach to service remediation.

50. The evolution of the 3C ICT Shared Service from being a back-office function to a digital enabler has commenced. The CDIO has provisioned senior digital leadership into the Councils and provided a set of skills that have improved the strategic approach and also in how the council manages its vendors and contracts, as well as providing strategic advice to the council’s leadership team. This is particularly evident in the Housing Improvement Board.

51. The move to a more open, collaborative and strategic approach has also led to a culture change across the organisations. Whilst service delivery issues remain, and remediation activity continues, there is a more positive attitude towards the ICT service from council colleagues, which has improved morale considerably, and is driving results as seen in the ICT Customer Survey.

Background Papers

Appendices

Appendix A: 3C ICT Audit Report

Appendix B: 3C ICT Customer Survey Outcome Report

Appendix C: 3C ICT Performance Metrics

Report Author:

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