



Committee report

Committee	CABINET
Date	13 JUNE 2019
Title	DIGITAL ISLAND – THE ISLE OF WIGHT DIGITAL STRATEGY
Report of	Leader and Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Business Development

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 As part of its ambitious regeneration and public service programmes and acting in its role as community leader the Council has led the development of a comprehensive strategy and action plan to position the Isle of Wight as a “Digital Island”.
- 1.2 The strategy contains a “road map” setting out the key project interventions under four key headings over the next three years. Many of these projects have already begun, stimulated by the sense of collective purpose the Council has mobilised over the last 18 months. The strategy and its action plan (section 10) are attached to this report as Appendix 1.
- 1.3 This report seeks Cabinet approval for the Digital Island strategy and road map confirming the Council’s commitment to leading the Island in realising the opportunities to residents and businesses of a shared digital future.
- 1.4 It also proposes oversight of the strategy by an Isle of Wight Digital board comprising key representatives from business, education, community and public services.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Digital technology presents major benefits for Island communities, allowing them to be connected in a way that has not previously been possible. However, the technology that enables innovation, growth and livelihoods also has the potential to create uncertainty and alienation for those who are left behind.
- 2.2 The Council recognised the opportunity presented by digital technology and embarked on a Digital Island Conference in 2017. This inaugural conference set out to understand the potential for digital technologies to address some of the real challenges the Island faced. The challenges discussed ranged from improving the digital skills of the Island's people and existing workforce, to addressing health and social care issues.
- 2.3 The Digital Island Strategy brings together the momentum gained since 2017 and sets out the strategic way forward for the Island to realise the potential opportunity digital technology presents for businesses and communities alike.

A Digital Island

- 2.4 The Island is embarking on an ambitious transformational programme of regeneration to address some of the structural, economic and financial challenges faced. As that programme takes shape, it is clear that digital technologies will contribute and impact across every single aspect of it. This is the case in terms of digital communications; involving communities in planning and implementing projects; in improving our digital infrastructure to enable business growth; or 'designing-in' digital into the physical regeneration of the Island.
- 2.5 Following the 2017 conference, an invitation to encourage delegates to join a **Digital Steering Group** received an enthusiastic response. With the Council, 25 people worked on a virtual digital platform and a total of 30 potential project ideas were identified.
- 2.6 The rollout of The Gigabit Island programme to enable full fibre digital connectivity across the Island provides the opportunity to access advanced broadband speeds for the majority of residents and businesses on the Island. The focus now is on the 'not-spot' areas, ensuring all communities are connected.
- 2.7 The Isle of Wight was named 2018 Smart Island by the Global Smart Islands network for, "setting out a collective and holistic approach to taking forward the digital agenda".
- 2.8 The rationale behind the development of the Digital Island is to identify the opportunities where digital technology can be used to enable solutions to regional challenges. Essentially, this is:
 - Supporting delivery of existing plans and policies (economic growth, regeneration, carbon, environment, tourism)

- Supporting digital transformation of Council services
- Enabling economic growth through digital technology, identifying priority economic areas for growth
- Identifying key skills required for individuals and businesses to engage with the digital agenda and benefit from the opportunities to grow
- Building the Island's Sense of Place and overcoming the feeling of 'dislocation'

A key part of the development of the Digital Island is to ensure the technology that enables innovation, growth and livelihoods does not create uncertainty and alienation for those who might be left behind.

- 2.9 The Council continues to seek to utilise available technologies in the provision of health and care services. Enabling older people to live independently and at home longer is a key objective for health and social care services. Use of assistive technology is beginning to contribute to this objective helping to avoid significant costs of having to be placed in residential or nursing care.
- 2.10 The social and economic benefits of a focused approach to the build of digital infrastructure and its strategic application across a range of policy areas are set out in the strategy, evidencing its significance to the achievement of Council corporate objectives, the wider prosperity of the Island and delivery of value for money services.
- 2.11 Following extensive consultation with a wide range of stakeholders, including the Digital Solent conference in November 2017 and the Digital Island conference in 2018, the need to recognise the increasing significance of *digital technologies* in every aspect of life and their potential contribution to tackling our key challenges required the development of a strategic approach, informing a set of key actions, for the Council and other stakeholders.
- 2.12 Responding to the UK Government's Digital strategy, which aims to make the UK a world leading digital economy that works for everyone, the Council has already signed the digital declaration proposed by the UK strategy committing public sector bodies to embracing the development of digital service delivery.
- 2.13 There is an opportunity to build on and accelerate the growing presence of jobs in companies working in the digital economy on the Island (5000+ jobs paying 30% higher than median average wages), jobs that are attracted by the excellent quality of life the Island has to offer. These jobs are underpinned by the investment that has taken place in the provision of Superfast broadband over the last five years and ongoing investment in full fibre providing Gigabit speeds to home and businesses, one of the first places in the UK to provide this.
- 2.14 New companies such as the contact centre provider Ascensos and existing firms such as Rapanui, based in Freshwater and Stainless Games based in Newport, operate in a global, cyber economy not impacted by the Island's physical disconnection from the UK mainland.

- 2.15 As well as economic benefits the successful development and deployment of digital technologies can also contribute to the delivery of better customer facing public services, transport, energy, health and social care and housing. Best in class broadband is now seen as the fourth utility and impacts on the daily lives of everyone living, working and visiting the Isle of Wight. The continuing development of artificial intelligence, the internet of things and real time global communications has the potential to transform the economic prospects for the Island and harness its benefits to improve quality of life for all.
- 2.16 The “Digital Island” strategy (Appendix 1) proposes a shared vision for the **Isle of Wight “to be the world’s smartest, most connected island.”**
- 2.17 To make progress in achieving this vision the Digital Island strategy proposes action in four key policy areas,
- **Digital skills and education** driving the uptake and recognition of the opportunity afforded to increased quality of life by digital technologies as well as the skills required to access services and deliver a digital economy
 - **Economic growth** through digital transformation of existing businesses followed by growth in new companies and attracting new enterprises
 - **Public sector services** addressing the financial pressure on local authority budgets through increased utilisation of digital technologies
 - **Sense of place** using digital technology to attract and retain people and businesses on the Island

3. STRATEGIC CONTEXT

- 3.1 In line with the corporate plan, the impact of approving the recommendations contained within this report, will deliver growth within the economy, more specifically within the digital economy on Island. The strategy will also support the Island’s improved digital and transport connectivity, education and skills and contribute to the provision of better health and social care services proposal will also support protecting the most vulnerable with housing, health and social care needs.
- 3.2 The draft regeneration strategy also outlines the Council’s commitment to improving skills and business development, specifically in the digital and technology based sectors of the economy. In developing existing communities and town centres through the provision of new housing, jobs and services, future proofing places through the strategic integration of best in class connectivity is a central objective of regeneration on the Island.
- 3.3 The Health and Well Being strategy has three key objectives for the population of the Isle of Wight – Start Well, Live Well and Age Well. Each one of these three key objectives require the development and successful deployment of digital technologies in learning, housing and care.

- 3.4 The Council's Digital transformation plan seeks to completely review and revise the way in which the Council uses Information Technology to improve all its services with increasing the range and number of online transactions at the centre of this approach.
- 3.5 All of this effort requires a properly considered strategic approach to managing the increased availability, take up and promotion of digital technologies on an Island wide basis. From a rural business keeping track of crop yields through drone and soil monitoring to grandparents keeping in touch with loved ones on the other side of the world, schools teaching coding as a key skill to integrated journey planning, the ubiquitous impact of digital living further enhances the Island's special status as one of the best, most inspirational places to live, work and visit.

4. OPTIONS

- 4.1 The installation and operation of access to digital mobile and broadband services is provided by infrastructure and operating providers such as BT, Openreach, EE, Virgin and WightFibre.
- 4.2 Businesses and residents are at liberty to purchase access to broadband connectivity and use it as they think fit in undertaking their affairs. As such the Council could decide not to intervene in this space and as the benefits of enhanced infrastructure become evident, rely on improved prosperity and quality of life resulting, perhaps measuring impacts on a periodic basis.
- 4.3 However, given the Council's strategic interest in the health and social care domain, the statutory requirement and the digital declaration to digitise its service offer, the commitment to regeneration and economic growth, encouraging digital inclusion and its skills and education responsibilities, a hands-off approach is not recommended.

Option 1 – Do not endorse the Digital Island strategy

Option 2 – Approve the “Digital Island – Isle of Wight Digital strategy” and accompanying road map and delegate its implementation to the Assistant Chief Executive and Director of Regeneration in liaison with the Leader and Cabinet member for Business Development and Regeneration

5. CONSULTATION

- 5.1 There have been two Digital conferences held in 2017 and 2018 to help inform the development of the strategy and road map setting out project interventions. These events were attended by over 300 organisations from the public, private and community sectors both on and off the Island.
- 5.2 A Digital steering group comprising over 25 individuals and organisations has supported the evolution of the strategy.

- 5.3 The development of the strategy itself has been subject of extensive stakeholder interviews and workshops.
- 5.4 The resulting profile of digital issues as a priority for the Isle of Wight has seen significant interest by national and local media and extensive Island conversation about the impacts of enhanced digital connectivity.
- 5.5 In order to ensure appropriate oversight and continue to harness the collective commitment and effort to developing the Digital Island approach a Digital Island board comprising representatives from public service partners and the private sector is proposed.

6. FINANCIAL / BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There are financial/budget implications that will arise as a result of the implementation of the Digital Island strategy:
 - Capital expenditure
 - Revenue expenditure

Capital expenditure:

- 6.2 **Wight Innovation hub** – One of the key economic growth projects in the strategy road map is the development of a business incubation facility provisionally titled “Wight Innovation hub” at the BAE Rangefinder campus. Solent LEP are co-financing with the Council the development of a full business case for this project, with a view to co-investing £750k capital funds in the building’s refurbishment. The Council has identified a figure of £750k in its capital programme towards the project, subject to completion of the project’s full business case.
- 6.3 **Local Full Fibre investment** – The Council has secured up to £712k from the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport public sector buildings upgrade programme to install full fibre access points in “public sector” buildings across the south and west Wight by March 2021. This will enable communities not covered by the commercial rollout of full fibre to benefit from this enhanced connectivity and enable public services, GPs, schools and town and parish councils to deliver remote access services through provision of unlimited broadband speeds. The Council has identified £80k match funding from its capital programme towards these works.
- 6.4 **Other strategy projects** – The Council has accessed Department of Health funding for its assisted technology in care programmes.

Support for other strategy proposals will be subject to production of relevant outline business cases, funding bids and support from third parties.

Current commitments already represent an initial £2.8m capital injection into the first three year action plan for the strategy.

Revenue expenditure:

6.5 Commitment to this strategy, in revenue terms, will be financed from within the Council's existing budgets for regeneration and digitisation.

6.6 Individual project interventions will have their own resource plans, which identify how they will be progressed in terms of capital and revenue funding sources.

7. CARBON EMISSIONS

7.1 Promoting the use of digital technology will help reduce travel and assist the successful deployment of smart grid technologies both impacting positively on reductions in carbon emissions.

8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

8.1 There will be legal implications associated with each project set out in the strategy. These will need to be identified for each project and appropriate legal advice and guidance received prior to full business cases being agreed. This can be done through the Council's own legal team or, where necessary, procured from external legal specialists.

9. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

9.1 The Council as a public body is required to meet its statutory obligations under the Equality Act 2010 to have due regard to eliminate unlawful discrimination, promote equal opportunities between people from different groups and to foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it. The protected characteristics are: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

9.2 Under the Equality Act 2010 we are required to have due regard to our equality duties when making decisions, reviewing services, undertaking projects, developing and reviewing policies. This must be done at the formative stage of any proposal, not retrospectively as justification for the recommendation.

9.3 A high level equalities impact assessment identified that implementation of the Digital Island Strategy would not have any adverse equality and diversity impacts. The implementation of the projects in the Digital Island strategy will have a positive effect on increasing digital inclusion and improving access to services for protected characteristics groups.

10. RISK MANAGEMENT

10.1 Each project brought forward in years 1-3 of the strategy's implementation will have its own risk logs and mitigating actions.

10.2 Not agreeing the strategy would create risks connected with funding approved from third parties for digital projects not being forthcoming or being withdrawn in the absence of a Council commitment expressed in a strategic policy document.

10.3 In this eventuality communications with potential and committed funders would highlight the specific outcomes of individual projects to funders strategic aims regardless of an Island based strategic approach.

11. EVALUATION

11.1 Given the need to maximise the benefits of available technologies, the Council has a key role to play in moving this agenda forward. Recognising the primary focus is to increase economic prosperity and improve public services, this paper and the accompanying strategy sets out an approach to meet this requirement.

11.2 This paper also identifies that while the aspiration to deliver a Digital Island in all respects, recognition needs to be given to the role of applied technologies in both supporting the MTFP and wider corporate plan objectives.

12. RECOMMENDATIONS

- Cabinet approve the “Digital Island – Isle of Wight Digital strategy” and accompanying road map and delegate its implementation to the Assistant Chief Executive and Director of Regeneration in liaison with the Leader and Cabinet member for Business Development and Regeneration.
- Cabinet approve the establishment and resourcing of an Isle of Wight Digital board to provide oversight, leadership and direction to implementation, monitoring and review of the Digital Island strategy.

13. APPENDICES ATTACHED

13.1 [Appendix 1: Digital Island – Isle of Wight Digital Strategy](#)

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