

**Full Council - Wednesday, 16 January 2019**

## **Written question from Cllr Whitehouse to the Leader, Isle of Wight Council**

If he will make a statement on his vision for making the Island an attractive location for digital business investment; if he will set out the benefits to the Island of achieving that vision; if he will clarify what progress has so far been made towards meeting his objectives; and if he will outline the future actions that are planned in this regard?

## ***Response***

Maximising the benefits of digital connectivity is key plank of our approach to securing future economic growth and working with our partners to improve public services on the Isle of Wight. Strengthening and increasing the traffic on our “digital bridge” will be one of the main ways we overcome the challenges of being an Island economy.

Following a landmark Digital conference in November 2017 our work to make the most of our digital opportunity has received international recognition by the Smart Island congress with the Isle of Wight being awarded the title “Smart Island” in 2018.

Work on the Wight fibre Gigabit Island project began last summer and will be rolled out over the next 3 years enabling island residents and businesses to enjoy some of the fastest internet speeds in the world. We are also seeking support from UK government to connect our rural areas to this network.

We are currently undertaking the second phase of development of our Digital Strategy where we are consolidating the initial work carried out in 2018 and finalising a Digital Strategy for the Island. Development of the Strategy is being undertaken in partnership with the public and private sector towards publishing our plans in March 2019.

Our shared vision for a Digital Island is based on core principles and objectives shaped by all stakeholders and is driven by the environment and the economy that characterises the unique nature of the Isle of Wight and is: To be the world’s smartest, most connected island.

The 2018 Digital Conference held in November provided a platform for the Council to confirm the key priority areas for action to take forward and these were identified as:

- Digital education and skills eg increasing the provision of coding training
- Attracting investment and people to the island as a place to invest, live and visit eg. promoting successful digital businesses that are thriving here
- Connectivity – improving mobile and broadband
- Economic growth for existing businesses through digital transformation eg. Improving the premises offer providing the right kind co-working flexible space digital companies seek.
- Digital provision of council services – this is a priority is already underway and is also an important plank of our One Public Service ambitions

In terms of the benefits and specific actions, we are looking at these across the key priority areas which will be finalised during a stakeholder workshop on the 4th February. In general terms the benefits will be across productivity gains, local

employment opportunities, efficient communication, over-coming island-separation and more efficient provision of council services.

One of the deliverables alongside the publication of our Digital Strategy will be the programme of work for 2019 and beyond.