Isle of Wight Council

Committee report

Committee	**POLICY AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FOR NEIGHBOURHOODS AND REGENERATION**
Date	**7 JULY 2022**
Title	**DIGITAL ISLAND – THE ISLE OF WIGHT DIGITAL STRATEGY**
Report of	**DEPUTY LEADER AND CABINET MEMBER FOR DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION, HOUSING, HOMELESSNESS AND POVERTY**

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. Many of these projects have already begun, stimulated by the sense of collective purpose the Council mobilised during the development of the strategy. The strategy and its action plan (section10) are attached to this report as Appendix 1.

1.3 The experience of the pandemic has clearly reinforced the importance of high quality connectivity in everyday life. The pandemic has also impacted on the overall progress with implementation of the strategies aims and actions

1.4 This report updates the Policy scrutiny committee on progress with the Digital Island strategy and road map confirming the Council's continuing commitment to leading the Island in realising the opportunities to residents and businesses of a shared digital future.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Policy and Scrutiny committee note the progress with the "Digital Island – Isle of Wight Digital strategy"

- The committee provide comments on the potential priorities for the next phase of the strategy given the impact of Covid 19 pandemic.

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 proposed 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 supports 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 Island 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 own 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   PROGRESS TO DATE

4.1 Considering each of the Digital Island's four key themes in turn, the main areas of progress since adoption of the strategy in 2019 are set out below:

Digital Skills and Education

4.2 Isle of Wight College have significantly enhanced their portfolio of courses to improve digital skills and have recently opened a new business centre for use by local companies

4.3 The pandemic forced great numbers of people to become more "literate" in the digital space. This has changed mindsets offering new opportunities to reach out to those previously concerned or resistant to embracing services delivered via digital platforms

4.4 Of continuing concern is the impact on young people of the move to on line learning during the pandemic, particularly those who found that transition difficult. Our colleagues in Education continue to work with schools to identify the future benefit of more flexible learning approaches but also the impacts on those whose progress may have been affected

Economic Growth

4.5 Innovation Wight hub – One of the key economic growth projects in the Digital Island strategy road map is the development of a business incubation facility called "Innovation Wight hub" at the BAE Rangefinder campus. Success in securing ERDF funding of over £1m will see this project be completed in

summer 2022 offering businesses co-working space and office rental as well as high speed connectivity. The Council has contributed £900k from its capital programme towards the project.

4.6 Local Full Fibre investment – Wight Fibre's £57m commercial roll out of full fibre to the premise has reached its halfway point with up to 95% of business and residential premises having access to full fibre by the end of 2023.Up to £9m Gigabit voucher investment is available to residents via Wight fibre to help support hard to reach, expensive to install areas of the island.

Public Sector Service projects

4.7 The Council has accessed Department of Health funding for its assisted technology in care programmes.

4.8 The NHS trust is planning ICT infrastructure upgrades on the island as part of its £43m estates investment plan.

4.9 The council's Digital action plan recognises this opportunity and is broadening the range of services able to be accessed digitally as a result.

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

Sense of place

4.11 The Island's digital credentials have been recognised by the Solent LEP in their 2050 regional strategy.

4.12 The Island as a destination of choice for remote working has impacted on our local housing market.

4.13 Digital business networks continue to flourish on the island despite the impact of the pandemic.

Total investment

4.14 Current commitments already represent an initial £3.8m capital injection into the strategy to date.

Revenue expenditure:

4.15 Commitment to the strategy, in revenue terms, is being financed from within the Council's existing budgets for regeneration and digitisation.

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

5.   <u>APPENDICES ATTACHED</u>

Appendix 1: Digital Island – Isle of Wight Digital Strategy

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