

Subject:	Greater Brighton Digital Action Plan Update		
Date of Meeting:	27 April 2021		
Report of:	Chair, Greater Brighton Officer Programme Board		
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Ward(s) affected:	All		

FOR GENERAL RELEASE**1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND POLICY CONTEXT**

- 1.1 At the Greater Brighton Economic Board “the Board” Meeting on 28 January 2020, the Board was presented with the Greater Brighton Digital Action Plan. This followed agreement on the Greater Brighton Digital Strategy in October 2019, and in early January 2020, a workshop attended by Board Members and other regional stakeholders identified a range of projects to meet the key priorities recommended in the Strategy, and these formed the basis of the Action Plan.
- 1.2 The Strategy and Action Plan looked at two key aspects. The first was around deployment and activation of key infrastructure, particularly next generation full fibre. The second theme explored the opportunities that new infrastructure will unlock and the potential for the Board to take a strategic leadership role in harnessing the many significant opportunities the new infrastructure will bring.
- 1.3 Due to Covid-19 the Board had to quickly take a strategic role in responding to the crisis and leading on economic recovery. Whilst some projects have continued at pace, the progress of some other activity inevitably slowed. The Covid-19 crisis has brought about years of change in the way companies in all sectors and regions do business. Likewise, the way Greater Brighton residents carry out their work and access goods and services. Due to the changed economic landscape across the region, a re-prioritisation of the digital themes and activity in the Strategy is required. An updated Action Plan with renewed timescales is outlined in this paper and in Appendix 1.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 That the Board agrees to the revised key priorities and projects outlined in this paper and the Action Plan at Appendix 1.

CONTEXT/ BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1 At the Board Meeting on 29 January 2019 the Board’s Five-Year Strategic Priorities paper was approved. In the paper, five strategic themes are identified; International, Creative, Connected, Talented and Resilient.
- 3.2 Under the Connected priority, activation of full-fibre infrastructure across the City Region was identified as a key priority with a target to increase the number of

residential and business premises utilising full fibre connection across the city region and maximising its potential to facilitate economic growth.

3.3 The approved Greater Brighton Digital Strategy was a clear statement of intent, which reviewed activity already underway, identified areas at an early stage of development and models for full fibre delivery, and provided recommendations around next steps. Within the Strategy 11 themes were identified;

1. Full Fibre
2. 5G
3. Public Connectivity (Citizen Wi-Fi)
4. Internet of Things
5. Business
6. Retail
7. Visitors
8. Transport & Environmental Monitoring
9. Work & Skills
10. Health & Social Care
11. Digital Inclusion

3.4 The first two themes focus on digital connectivity and access. There is a significant amount of work underway across the City Region for delivering full fibre and this work continues at pace. The emergence of 5G has been well documented and is reliant on widespread full fibre infrastructure, underlining the strategic importance of delivering dense fibre networks as a critical step to being 5G-ready.

3.5 The focus on the remaining themes is around digital services. The digital services themes address the value-generating services that use the new connectivity, and include intelligent transport systems, smart energy solutions, open data services, cloud computing, digital services and others.

3.6 Due to the unprecedented economic impact of COVID-19 across the region, but particularly on retail, business and visitor economy, five key themes have been prioritised. In order to work towards the delivery of the digital action plan, it is proposed that £20k is allocated from the Greater Brighton work plan budget 2021/2022. These priorities reflect the change in the regional economic landscape, and use digital as an enabler to stimulate growth:

- 5G
- Retail
- Visitors
- Transport
- Digital Inclusion

5G

3.7 The rollout of the 5G network is a commercial process driven by network providers. However, the roll out is aided by having a lot of fibre connectivity in the area, so the work being done around the roll out of full fibre is helping the delivery of 5G in the city region. There is also a workstream around ensuring that local businesses are best placed to leverage the value from 5G. Brighton & Hove has recently signed a grant fund agreement with Coast to Capital LEP for

the Research and Innovation Fibre Ring. This is a project which is being jointly delivered with the digital catapult centre Brighton, and includes a new fibre ring around the city which among other things connects New England House with the Dome and Corn Exchange. This creates a link between the existing 5G test bed at New England House, and proposed new 5G test bed at the Dome. This new 5G Test bed will look at how 5G technology can be utilised in an arts and culture setting.

Retail

- 3.8 This is a critical area post pandemic, with a mixed picture of how retailers fared during forced high street closures. The impact has been particularly severe for non-essential retail, and less severe for those businesses who pivoted by switching/increasing digital delivery models. E-commerce sales remained solid throughout the entirety of 2020, as consumers continued to shop online (even when restrictions in the UK eased over the summer months). The future of retail is going to be reliant on high streets becoming multifunctional spaces.
- 3.9 The continued rise of digital should be seen as an opportunity for the sector and not a threat that will kill the high street. Push notifications to shopper smartphones notifying them of real-time deals and augmented reality apps that expand the range of products available in store are some of the possibilities. Also being mooted are 'try before you buy' shops/services such as Amazon Wardrobe where the items are arranged to be delivered and tested at home, rather than taken home from the store. Seamless connectivity will be required to make the most of the opportunity, so there are clear linkages with the Citizen Wi-Fi theme.
- 3.10 There was acknowledgment that there is a need to work more with education partners to look at how you get digital inclusion and learning opportunities into the high-street e.g. Apple learning forums, and how best to support SMEs to understand how new technology can benefit their business models.

Visitors

- 3.11 The visitor economy, and in particular hospitality, has been the hardest hit sector by Covid-19 and digital has a huge role to play in building the sector back up again. Brighton & Hove's night-time economy, for example, pre-pandemic was a major selling point for visitors. In 2018 76% of tourists visited restaurants during their stay, with 34% going to a pub or club and 7% to a gig or theatre. There is a role for digital engagement to play in helping this sector recover.
- 3.12 Creating engaging and dynamic digital experiences for visitors is a significant opportunity, that will help them find and engage with the wide and varied offer that Greater Brighton has to offer. A visitor experience is largely driven by the heart and not by the head, so there is a strong need to develop compelling content that is rapidly changing and managed appropriately.
- 3.13 There is a need to diversify the offer to visitors, create itineraries that will make people stay longer and spend more. To do this there needs to be a clear understanding of visitor behaviour but currently this information is disparate and fragmented. The Board should work with partners such as Visit England, Experience West Sussex and Visit Brighton to support the visitor sector promote

the region for staycation breaks and holidays, as well as with local trade bodies to lobby national government for a Tourism Sector Deal for the region.

- 3.14 There also needs to be clarity around what the identity for the City Region and the unique offer is. The Pitch for Place narrative should be used to help sell the region and the many different offers across the Greater Brighton area, and communicated through appropriate channels.
- 3.15 New opportunities for business growth projects in tourism and creative industries should be sought out to transform the pace of growth in these sectors, attracting new investment and moving into new markets to build back stronger.

Transport

- 3.16 Transport will be a priority target area for carbon reduction within the Greater Brighton Energy plan. Intelligent transport systems and smart cities will be crucial in reducing emissions, promoting active travel, increasing access and improving the overall efficiency of the City Region's transport networks. Again, digital connectivity will be the enabler of these new technologies so it would be helpful to hold a transport discovery event for lead transport officers from Greater Brighton and wider South East region.
- 3.17 How are commuting patterns associated with travel-to-work and travel-to-learn flows going to change over the longer-term post pandemic and what does this mean for our existing travel infrastructure?

Work & Skills

- 3.18 The Industrial Strategy Council forecast that five million workers could become acutely under-skilled in basic digital skills by 2030. This holds back those people from employment, limits their ability to progress, reduces economic growth, and makes the UK a less attractive place to invest.
- 3.19 In terms of Work and Skills we need to see what opportunities emerge from the Skills White Paper around digital.
- 3.20 The government have announced support for SMEs to grow through a new scheme to boost productivity: Help to Grow: Digital, a new scheme to help 100,000 SMEs save time and money by adopting productivity-enhancing software, transforming the way they do business.

Digital Inclusion

- 3.21 One in ten of the region's population still do not have regular access to the internet and are more isolated from information and new working practices. Some businesses have the skills and means to benefit from new services, but others do not, and this is also true for households or individuals. There is evidence that UK firms are relatively slow to adopt basic digital technologies, such as customer relationship and eCommerce tools that have been shown to have significant productivity benefits.

The suggestion was that as a starting point officers should develop a report for a future Board Meeting on digital inclusion provision at each local authority. The report would need to specify funding levels, providers, numbers reached and future plans. Once we know the current offering we can then look at how the gaps can be addressed and what solutions there are at the regional level.

Other Themes

These areas are still important but are where the Board can add less direct value at the current time, though will continue to support current activity.

Full Fibre

3.22 City Fibre have confirmed their £80m investment in full fibre for Brighton & Hove, and the roll out of their programme started in February 2021.

The Converged Fibre Connectivity (CFC) project to build 41km of duct and dark fibre network from Crawley, Manor Royal to Burgess Hill is progressing as planned, it will complete in July 2021. The additional spur to connect the Horsham Enterprise Park will also be completed as planned. Commercialisation conversations for rural and urban parts of the network are now under way led by West Sussex County Council (WSSCC) and Mid Sussex District Council (MSDC).

The Burgess Hill Fibre ring and dig once programme led by MSDC is also progressing as planned with key elements nearing completion.

The CFC project, Burgess Hill Fibre Ring and the Brighton Research and Innovation Fibre Ring together represent a contiguous regional open access network. It will unlock opportunities for building out fibre to homes and businesses, providing resilience, and making high quality dark fibre available to the private and public sector.

Regional connectivity plans are currently being developed by WSSCC under the West Sussex Full Fibre programme to extend the above open access network (from Crawley to Brighton extending further along the West Sussex coast) to align with one of its Digital Infrastructure strategy priorities.

Commercial roll out of fibre - WSSCC is working with the local and national telecoms market with the aim of accelerating further commercial investment to the region. These deployments will be announced by suppliers as part of their commercial plans. The commercial deployment of fibre by CityFibre within West Sussex will take place alongside the WS Gigabit public sector network to ensure minimum disruption to the highway. The CityFibre commercial investment in the county represents around £100m, deploying fibre to circa 185,000 premises (both homes and businesses). The timetable for roll out is being firmed up by CityFibre but is currently expected to be completed by mid-2023 across these areas: Worthing, Crawley, Horsham, Chichester, Littlehampton, Bognor Regis.

The Outside In project has been launched by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) as “Project Gigabit”, a key pillar of which is the extension of its UK Gigabit Voucher Scheme to contribute towards meeting its digital

infrastructure targets. West Sussex is expected to be in phase 2 and are currently in discussion with DCMS as part of the “planning for gigabit” pilot.

WSSC’s Voucher top up Scheme been very successful and has either delivered to, or committed to deliver to approximately 4,000 premises to date. This has leveraged £3m in DCMS funding.

Mobile Mapping of county 3G and 4G coverage is progressing and modelling has been undertaken to overlay it with countywide public assets. This is facilitating conversations with Mobile Network Operators about their investments in West Sussex.

Our open access assets will be launched by WSSC this year following the mobile mapping above and alongside our mobile operator engagement. It will require all appropriate assets owned by councils in West Sussex to be made available to the market in order to accelerate interest in 4G not spots and potentially encourage operators to make use of public assets as opposed to new masts for the commercial deployment of current and future mobile infrastructure.

The superfast Better-Connected project closed in March. It exceeded its 95% target, extending further into the hardest to reach areas within its combined £30m budget. West Sussex achieved 96.8% superfast coverage as a result of the project.

Public Connectivity (Citizen Wi-Fi)

- 3.23 Wi-Fi services are important with a high percentage of people using them to plug poor mobile network coverage, manage their data limits and benefit from better speeds. Citizen Wi-Fi is a concept that if designed well, with clear outcomes and benefits, could be deployed across the City Region.
- 3.24 Worthing Town Centre Citizen Wi-Fi goes live later this year, following the commencement of the Wi-Fi supplier starting work in summer 2021. The benefits of Citizen Wi-Fi are wide reaching and will help business recover from the pandemic, attract consumers back onto the high street and innovate the city centre customer experience.

Internet of things

- 3.25 A strategic approach to the internet of things (IoT) is vital for Greater Brighton as it will enable standardised and well-managed approaches to a number of solutions such as traffic management, air quality management, flood risk detection and many others.
- 3.26 The recommendation made in the Digital Strategy was to commission a study to develop an IoT Strategy for the City Region, to incorporate open data standards and data privacy standards. This fits in with the Greater Brighton Innovation Ecosystem work being led by the University of Brighton.

Business

- 3.27 Covid-19 has sped up the business sectors adoption of digital technologies by several years and many changes that have been introduced into business delivery models are likely to be here for the long haul. To stay competitive requires new digital strategies and practices, and to recognise technology's importance as a critical component of the business. During the pandemic, consumers have moved dramatically toward online channels, and companies and industries have responded in turn.
- 3.28 There is a need to understand the needs of both digital and non-digital businesses to ensure digital inclusion across the business community. The Business Hothouse Programme continues to attract excellent interest. As of early March, over 260 businesses/individuals have received start-up coaching support, with around half of those receiving over 12 hours. There have been 119 applications made to the Invest4 Grant programme, with a number of these approved. The value of the approved grants is around £330,000, and this brings in around £520,000 of match-funding.
- 3.29 Local authority partners have awarded over £200 million in business grants to over 20,000 eligible businesses, and over £6 million in discretionary grants. Some businesses will have used this funding to move to a more digital model of operating. Local Authorities have also been collaborating with partners to provide innovative further support to businesses that need it most.

4 ANALYSIS & CONSIDERATIONS OF OTHER OPTIONS

- 4.1 Given that Government have made it clear that Digital Infrastructure is a priority, other cities and city regions are looking to move ahead quickly in this space. In many domains the Greater Brighton City Region is at an early stage, and in others it is among the most advanced in the UK. There is a need to grasp the opportunity and build a strategic approach that could see Greater Brighton as a leader in digital futures in the UK. Hence the Board is recommended to seriously consider how to establish a digital fund to allow the development of investable propositions. The Digital Strategy and Action Plan has been developed with no budget so far, and progress to match the size of the opportunity will only be enabled with some development funding.
- An alternative to the recommended next steps would be to adopt a do-nothing approach or take an inconsistent approach across the region, which would risk the Greater Brighton region being left behind and pose a threat to future productivity, competitiveness, prosperity and recovering.

5 CONCLUSION

This paper details the renewed focus on digital projects across the region, with a re-prioritisation of actions. These actions are summarised in Appendix 1.

6. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

Financial Implications:

- 6.1 An allocation of £20,000 has been identified from the Greater Brighton Operation Budget to support the Digital Action Plan in 2021-22 Details of funding streams and investment for each of the elements such as Full Fibre investment from City Fibre, business support through the Business Hothouse Programme and LEP support for the Research and Innovation Fibre Ring are detailed above within the report.

*Finance Officer Consulted: Rob Allen, Principal Accountant
Date: 19/04/2021*

Legal Implications:

- 6.2 There are no legal implications arising at this stage from this report, specific legal issues will be addressed as work on the individual projects are progressed.

*Lawyer Consulted: Joanne Dunyaglo, Senior Property Lawyer
Date: 12/04/21*

Equalities Implications:

- 6.3 There are no equalities implications arising directly from this report, though the report acknowledges the need to address issues of digital exclusion within the city region. The equalities implications of this will be addressed on a project by project basis.

Sustainability Implications:

- 6.4 There are no sustainability implications arising from this report.

Any Other Significant Implications:

- 6.5 None

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Appendices:

1. Greater Brighton Digital Action Plan

Background Documents

1. [Greater Brighton Digital Strategy](#)