Agenda item 12

Towards Digital Growth – Draft Framework and Priorities

Report Author: Neil Hayes, Hertfordshire LEP

1   Purpose of report

1.1   This report provides a short update on the development of a framework to accelerate the provision and utilisation of digital technologies in Hertfordshire. The key findings will be covered in the presentation of the paper and draft Framework.

1.2   Attached at Appendix A is the report outlining a framework and initial priorities. This is a draft document which will be finalised over the summer to further refine key recommendations, timescales and associated resource requirements. As such, it will be further returned to the Growth Board for approval.

2   Background

2.1   This document is part of a suite of activity aimed at exploring how Hertfordshire can achieve more responsible growth in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting effect on the economy.

2.2   The themes of 'Digital' 'Clean' and 'Inclusive' growth were originally identified in the development of Hertfordshire's Local Industrial Strategy (LIS) developed by the LEP in 2019.

2.3   This work was put on hold in early 2020 to focus on economic recovery but has now been revisited and all three themes will be considered with the Growth Board as it moves its work programme priorities forward over 2021.

2.4   The work identified that Hertfordshire's provision of next generation, gigabit fibre lags behind that of neighbouring areas and a market engagement exercise with providers recognised that perceptions needed to be improved to secure more investment.

2.5   In benchmarking against areas which had accelerated fibre provision and secured significant funding from HMG, it was clear that a central resource was key to success.

2.6   A series of immediate recommendations are proposed to better inform the future strategy namely:
- Consistency of emphasis in Local Plans & Planning
- Establishing a Market Information Day for providers

HGB

- Improved GIS Mapping to identify public sector assets and support funding bids

2.7 In addition, a number of workstreams have been identified that focus on key themes such as:
- Ongoing market engagement
- Removing barriers to development (e.g. wayleaves)
- Using public sector assets to accelerate roll-out and co-ordinating future public sector connectivity requirements
- Addressing digital exclusion and skills gaps,
- Improving business connectivity
- Ensuring digital connectivity is central to town centre regeneration

2.8 Finally, the report proposes that a number of foundations are required to move the work forward including:
- Sponsorship/ownership of this work as a priority for the Growth Board
- Establishing a 'Digital Board' to oversee the development of this work into a wider strategy, work with providers and steer funding bids
- Enhancing the capacity of existing resource (e.g. Connected Counties team) is needed to power this work going forward

3   implications

3.1 There are no adverse legal, financial, equalities, environmental, sustainability or other implications arising from this report and its recommendations which support the ongoing work and priorities of the Hertfordshire Growth Board.

4   Recommendations

4.1 That Leaders approve the draft Framework and Priorities as attached, to be further developed into a final version later this year, and

4.2 Options to establish/address the foundation matters identified in 2.8 above be investigated over the summer so approval and implementation can progress late summer/ early autumn 2021.