Agenda item 7

Towards Digital Growth – Hertfordshire Digital Framework and Priorities

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1   Purpose of report

1.1   This report provides an update on the completion of the framework to accelerate the provision and utilisation of digital technologies in Hertfordshire. The Board received a presentation on the draft Framework back in June 2021.

1.2   Attached at Appendix A is the final Framework for approval along with recommended next steps and priorities for implementing the key framework actions. The Local Enterprise Partnership and Hertfordshire County Council have identified resource requirements to take this work forward, the Growth Board is asked to match their funding contributions.

2   Background

2.1   This Framework document is part of a suite of activity aimed at exploring how Hertfordshire can achieve more responsible growth following 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 and 2022.

2.4   This report seeks to:
- understand the current digital landscape in respect to the current levels of full fibre/gigabit and mobile coverage within the county.
- understand the future investment plans of the telecommunications sector in Hertfordshire.
- compare Hertfordshire with its local authority neighbours surrounding London.
- understand the market's current interest in Hertfordshire and the extent of any interest.
- ascertain how Hertfordshire is perceived by the telecom sector; do its policies attract or discourage investment?

- ascertain what role the public and private sectors can play in attracting further investment.

2.5   The insights from these different strands of work have informed the development of this Digital Framework and, specifically, the four priorities identified within it.

2.6   The most urgent priority (1) is for Hertfordshire to take urgent steps to accelerate the delivery of a high-quality digital infrastructure which is at least on a par with that of its neighbours. Hertfordshire then needs to use this infrastructure.

2.7   In seeking to achieve pervasive digitization, it must flex public sector assets, levers, and resources to the full (Priority 2). Consistent with the findings of the Made Smarter Review – led by Jurgen Maier a few years ago – there is a need to effect widespread adoption of digital technologies across businesses of all sizes and from all sectors, and within places and communities (Priority 3).

2.8   In addition, Hertfordshire needs to seize the opportunity to build a world class digital sector (Priority 4). It has some world class digital businesses – but there is scope for many more, particularly if it can nurture outstanding digital talent across its workforce.

2.9   These four elements define the basis for a wide-ranging and dynamic digital strategy and are included in the document at Appendix A.

3   Next steps and action

3.1   The Framework report proposes that a number of next steps are required to move the work forward including:
- Sponsorship/ownership of this work as a priority for the Growth Board, LEP and Hertfordshire County Council
- That a 'Digital Board' is established to oversee the development of this work into a wider strategy, work with providers and steer funding bids, the Digital Board to report progress into the Growth Board but to have wider industry representation included on it
- Enhancing the capacity of existing resource deployed upon this area (e.g., the Connected Counties team) to power this work going forward.

3.2   It is anticipated that this programme will require a combined contribution of around £160k p/a over three years to provide the capacity to take the framework forward.

3.3   The contribution is proposed to be split three ways between HCC, the LEP and the Growth Board and would be reviewed annually. The LEP

contribution would be subject to the outcome of the LEP Review expected later in the year.

3.4 It is proposed that the resource is hosted by HCC to ensure collaboration with the existing Connected Counties team/work is maximised. The new Digital Board will be aligned with the Growth Board and the intention is to have that in place by 1/4/2022.

3.5 The match funding contribution from the Growth Board Growth Fund will need to be a commitment from 22/23 onwards.

4 Implications

4.1 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. This work was identified as a priority by Leaders in 2021.

4.2 Financial implications are referenced above, legal compliance with national subsidy control regulations may be a requirement of delivering this work in future.

5 Recommendations

5.1 That Leaders approve the final Digital Framework and Priorities as attached.

5.2 That the Growth Board's financial contribution to this work by the LEP and Hertfordshire County Council is agreed as a commitment from the Growth Board Growth Fund budget, and

5.3 The other implementation steps set out in the Framework including establishment of a digital oversight Board are agreed.