



Resources and Equality Scrutiny Panel

02 February 2023

Report title	Digital Wolverhampton Strategy Update	
Cabinet member with lead responsibility	Councillor Obaida Ahmed	
Wards affected	All	
Accountable director	Charlotte Johns, Director of Strategy	
Originating service	External Funding and Digital Projects	
Accountable employee(s)	Heather Clark	Head of Digital Projects
	Tel	01902 555614
	Email	Heather.Clark2@wolverhampton.gov.uk
Report to be/has been considered by	Cabinet Member Briefing	1 February 2023

Recommendation(s) for action or decision:

The Scrutiny Panel is recommended to:

1. Scrutinise the progress and the approach to delivering priorities of the Digital Wolverhampton Strategy.

1. Purpose

- 1.1. To provide an update on progress in the delivery of the Digital Wolverhampton Strategy.

2. Background

- 2.1 The Council adopted the Wolverhampton Digital Infrastructure Strategy in January 2020 to support the rollout of futureproofed digital infrastructure including full fibre broadband and 5G. Futureproofed digital infrastructure is the backbone of a modern thriving economy driving productivity and spreading growth and in delivering effective and efficient public services.
- 2.2 Key milestones are highlighted in appendix 1 including appointment of a Cabinet Member for Digital City to drive forward this agenda supported by the Council's Digital Champion and Co-ordinator and the establishment of the Digital Wolverhampton Partnership comprising the key anchor institutions in the city: the Council, University of Wolverhampton, City of Wolverhampton College, The Royal Wolverhampton NHS Trust, Black Country Integrated Care Board (ICB) and Wolverhampton Homes.
- 2.3 The adoption of digital services is considered critical to level-up our economy to power economic and social recovery with the pandemic accelerating their adoption by between 2-5 years. The Digital Wolverhampton Strategy was adopted in March 2022 to deliver the following aims:
 - A. Wolverhampton is a Gigabit and Smart City with futureproofed digital infrastructure including full fibre broadband and 5G utilised to transform delivery of services and develop new applications to unlock its potential.
 - B. 100% digitally included Wolverhampton ensuring all residents have the access to devices, connectivity and skills to take advantage of what digital has to offer
 - C. Growing the Digital Economy and talent pipeline building on our futureproofed infrastructure to start and grow businesses creating jobs for local residents meeting skills needs for the future.

3. Progress in delivering the Digital Wolverhampton Strategy

- 3.1 **Digital Infrastructure:** significant progress has been made in the rollout of futureproofed digital infrastructure since the adoption of the Wolverhampton Digital Infrastructure Strategy in January 2020. 170 public sector buildings have been upgraded to full fibre broadband funded by £4.9 million Local Full Fibre Network grant. Wolverhampton's gigabit coverage (300MB) has increased from 2% in September 2020 to 90.8% end 2022. Full fibre broadband coverage (1GB) has increased from 1% of properties in January 2020 to 37.8% of properties at the end 2022 (Connected Nations 2022). However latest intelligence from City Fibre's commercial rollout of full fibre broadband indicates that a higher proportion of premises are ready for service. Openreach and

Virgin Media are also upgrading their infrastructure to full fibre. All Mobile Network Operators have announced rollout of 5G in the City accelerated by over six months due to a proactive approach. Small cells have been installed on 9 streetlights across the city with 2 already live, with the other 7 small cells following imminently. Over 20,000 streetlights have been upgraded to LED and installed with Smart City nodes as part of the European Regional Development Fund Smart Infrastructure project enabling installation of sensors contributing to our smart city ambitions.

- 3.1 A report on the economic impact of full fibre rollout (Hatch March 2022) outlined key benefits from the rollout of full fibre including:
- A. Jobs created through the network build and associated productivity gains.
 - B. Estimated 0.8% increase in house prices from full fibre connectivity as compared to superfast connectivity.
 - C. 1.2% increase in business productivity as well as benefits arising from flexible working and a wider pool of labour.
 - D. Direct benefits to the public sector estimated at 1.2% cost savings from efficiencies.
 - E. Wider benefits in relation to supporting the rollout of 5G, enabling Smart City and Internet of Things, health care benefits and environmental benefits from carbon savings.
- 3.2 **Digital Inclusion:** in response to the scale of digital exclusion highlighted during the pandemic, the Council set up Wolves Online, a device and connectivity lending scheme, to support residents get online. Working with a network of 52 trusted partners, Wolves Online has distributed 1132 devices, 8700 gigabit of data and supporting over 2140 residents to improve their digital skills. To support our Trusted Partners a Digital Champion network will be set up recruiting volunteers to support the delivery of digital skills in the community working in partnership with Barclays Wings and Eagles digital skills offering. An online portal will support the development of digital skills, online live learning sessions and Digital Champions. Barclays train the trainer program works with organisations, charities and UK public to train people to become confident and have the skill set to support others with digital skills. The Council is also working closely with Black Country Connected for a Healthier Future to distribute 800 devices to residents through our trusted partner network.
- 3.3 Wolves Tech Aid, Wolverhampton's local device recycling scheme, has to date recycled 325 devices and distributed to children via seven schools. An additional 212 have been donated and are ready for distribution / undergoing refurbishment. We are working with the School Improvement Team to identify schools who could benefit. Additional campaigns to donate devices are anticipated January and March 2023 targeting residents and businesses.

- 3.4 **Digital Innovation:** supports the Our City: Our Plan driven by digital agenda and has the potential to improve efficiencies and contribute to the Medium Term Financial Strategy. The city is already home to the 5sprinG Application Accelerator supporting organisations to harness the power of 5G to deliver growth and innovation. The University of Wolverhampton recently won Cyber University of the Year has innovation labs and Wolverhampton Cyber Security Institute at the Science Park. The recently launched National Brownfield Institute (NBI) on Springfield campus is a world-class research centre that provides the facility to develop modern methods of building through innovation and partnership with the construction industry, focusing on the practical application of future brownfield regeneration and remediation.
- 3.5 We are working with a range of partners to support the use of digital to improve delivery of services and quality of life. The Connected Tower Block, led by health partners has introduced 13 heat and humidity sensors with the ambitions of expanding the trial to include Smart Building Management, health, independent living and digital inclusion. 100 sensors will be made available for virtual wards within Wolverhampton. Wolverhampton was also part of WM5G's health use case including remote diagnostics between a care home and GP.
- 3.6 The Council is developing technology enabled service delivery roadmaps for better and more efficient services setting out how we will use technology to deliver and innovate services including:
- A. Technology enabled service delivery making better and more efficient services.
 - B. Technology enabled independent living and health to improve quality of life, prevent and manage health conditions
 - C. Addressing key challenges and priorities through technology.
 - D. Ensure digital skills of workforce to embrace and implement digital innovation solutions.
- 3.7 The Council are exploring an Internet of Things Platform which will collate and analyse data from Smart City devices such as fly tipping camera that monitor and report incidents across the city.
- 3.8 **Digital Economy (business):** During the pandemic 76% of Small-Medium Businesses relied on digital and 52% used digital to sell more and stay connected. Businesses able to channel shift to online trading & secure online customers were more successful and resilient. Wolverhampton's Business Week included a range of workshops around innovation and Virtual Reality for commerce, ranking your business at the top of Google, doing business with Amazon, introduction to selling online and digital marketing. As a city, we are supporting digital innovation in key sectors and their supply chain and support the growth of the tech sector including taking advantage of regional initiatives such as West Midlands Smart City Region Programme to drive new digital start-ups. Market research including business digital needs will be part of iGNITE enterprise hub

project informing the future business support offer. Driven by local tech companies, a Creative Chain network has been established for the best digital agencies in the city.

- 3.9 **Digital Economy (skills and jobs):** Digital skills are crucial for the workplace. The pandemic led to increased digitisation in the workplace, however nationally only 52% of workforce have the necessary digital skills for work. The Council developed the Digital Wolves website to bring local and national digital skills opportunities in one place. In addition, we are working closely with the City of Wolverhampton College and University of Wolverhampton to develop the Digital Wolverhampton Infrastructure Academy supporting local residents into digital infrastructure jobs.
- 3.10 There are significant opportunities for growth amongst digital businesses with tech vacancies making up a higher proportion of all vacancies in the UK post-pandemic with the average tech salary 50% higher than the average offering significant opportunities for local residents. The Council are proactively promoting digital bootcamps to support unemployed residents and career changers into these opportunities through the Digital Wolves website, Workbox and Wolves at Work. 69 Wolverhampton residents have attended bootcamps to date, and further increase take up, the Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) are funding a local cyber project aimed at encouraging children, young people and adults to consider cyber as a career option.
- 3.11 The Digital Wolves website continues to be reviewed and improved with further access to key information for key stakeholders.

4 Financial implications

- 4.1 As an update on progress, there are no direct financial implications from this report. Delivery of the Digital Wolverhampton Strategy utilises existing budgets as outlined in the Cabinet report on 23 March 2022.
- 4.2 Digital Infrastructure: The Council has previously secured a capital grant of £4.9 million from the Local Full Fibre Network to connect 170 public sector premises to full fibre broadband. The ongoing rollout of digital infrastructure is commercially funded with the Council performing an enabler and facilitation role. Income from telecoms equipment is used to address barriers to the rollout.
- 4.3 Digital Inclusion: Budgets have already been identified to fund the digital inclusion programme, specifically £500,000 within the latest approved capital programme (Cabinet 23 February 2022) and £500,000 revenue from the Covid Emergency Grant Fund (Individual Executive Decision Notice March 2022). External funding opportunities will also be sought to provide additional support to get our residents online working with community partners.
- 4.4 Digital Innovation: For technology enabled independent living, we will explore opportunities such as the use of disability facilities grant and personal budgets, as well as

partner investment and external funding opportunities. Gain share resources are being explored for funding proof of concept, subject to approval.

- 4.5 Digital Economy: is funded by national and regional business support and skills activities funded including UK Shared Prosperity Fund and Adult Education Budget.
[LD/13012023/P]

5 Legal implications

- 5.1 As an update on progress in delivering the strategy, there are no direct legal implications from this report. However, part of our enabling role for the rollout of digital infrastructure has involved standardised wayleaves, leases and licence agreements in line with Electronic Communication Code.

[SZ/10012023/P]

6 Equalities implications

- 6.1 Digital and smart technology could potentially have significant positive equalities implications, for example making it easier for people with health problems to live more independently through the provision of telecare and e-health solutions.

7 Climate change and environmental implications

- 7.1 Digital Infrastructure enabling Smart technology can have positive implications on the environment and climate change, for example enabling the Council to capture environmental information and improve service delivery.

8 Health and Wellbeing Implications

- 8.1 There is regular review of the evidence base around risk of telecommunications. The Council regularly checks this with the national responsible agency, UK National Security Agency, and there is no peer review published high quality evidence of any association between 5G and harmful health. The UK National Security Agency advise that the current exposure of the general public to radio waves is well within the international health-related guideline levels that are used in the UK. Research into the safety of radio signals has been conducted for more than 50 years. The strong consensus of the public health agencies, such as the World Health Organisation, is that no health risks have been established from exposure to the low-level radio signals used for mobile communications.
- 8.2 Digital can also offer health benefits arising from increased use of technology in the delivery of health and social care and technology enabled independent living. 5G is enabling the opportunity to pilot health use cases including remote diagnostics between GPs and care homes.

9 Human resources implications

- 9.1 The Council is currently developing a digital skills offer to improve digital skills of the workforce and ensuring all employees have access to digital.

10 Corporate landlord implications

- 10.1 Corporate Landlord were involved in developing standardised lease agreements to use Council assets for the location of telecoms infrastructure.

11 Covid Implications

- 11.1 Covid-19 pandemic highlighted a particular issue around digital exclusion that led to the establishment of Wolves Online device and connectivity lending scheme.

12 Schedule of background papers

- a. Cabinet - 22 January 2020 [Wolverhampton Digital Infrastructure Strategy](#)
- b. Cabinet – 23 March 2022 [Digital Wolverhampton Strategy](#)
- c. Cabinet – 19 October 2022 [Digital Wolverhampton Strategy Update](#)

13 Appendices

- a. Appendix 1: Digital Wolverhampton Programme timeline

This report is PUBLIC
[NOT PROTECTIVELY MARKED]

Appendix 1:

Digital Wolverhampton Programme Key Achievements

CITY OF
WOLVERHAMPTON
COUNCIL

