

Board/Committee:	Policy & Organisation Board
Date of meeting:	28 th September 2022
Title:	'Gosport – the Digital Peninsula' digital strategy for the borough.
Author:	Assistant to Chief Executive
Status:	For Decision

Purpose

This report sets out the key elements of 'Gosport – the Digital Peninsula' the digital strategy for the borough. Currently in draft form it is intended to undertake a consultation exercise with partners on its priorities and in response develop a detailed action plan.

Recommendation

That the Board:

- i) Endorses the draft version of the digital strategy for the borough.**
- ii) Instructs the Assistant Chief Executive to undertake a consultation exercise with partners is undertaken on this draft digital strategy and, based upon its feedback, a detailed action plan is submitted to a future Board meeting for approval.**

1.0 Background

- 1.1** The Gosport Infrastructure Investment Plan (2019), produced by the Solent Local Enterprise Partnership, identified telecommunications as one of the five priorities required to facilitate a step change in the Borough's economy. In particular the roll out of next generation 5G mobile and ultrafast broadband connectivity would reinforce Gosport's attractiveness as a business location, help diversify its existing business base and improve public sector delivery. It is also critical in developing the concept of Gosport being a 'Digital Peninsula' to help attract residents and businesses to the borough.
- 1.2** In addition the more recent Covid-19 pandemic saw an accelerated channel shift towards digital/online customer service delivery and engagement, along with businesses, organisations and groups operating online. The indications are that these trends will continue going forward, with the result that it will have significant impact on how residents meet their everyday needs and how businesses, organisations and groups operate.
- 1.3** As a response to the points above a Council cross departmental project team has developed this draft strategy to make Gosport a better place to live and work online.

1.4 One of its underlying principles is partnership working i.e. taking a collaborative approach with relevant partners, from both the private and public sector, will make more of an impact compared to the council working independently. As a result it is the intention to consult with those partners and based upon their feedback develop a detailed action plan for the strategy.

2.0 Report

The following highlights the key points of the draft strategy that is attached as appendix 1.

2.1 Our digital vision

Our aim is that Gosport's residents, businesses, organisations and groups will have access to the digital connection that they need, in terms of speed and capacity, both now and in the future. They will also have the skills and access to any support needed to utilise that digital connection for their benefit. thereby making Gosport a better place to live and work.

2.2 To achieve this vision the following priorities have been identified:

1. Digital infrastructure and service provision accessibility.
2. Digital inclusion and service provision take-up/usage.
3. Digital skills and careers promotion.
4. The Gosport Digital Peninsula Partnership.

2.3 In delivering against those priorities the following principles will be applied:

- Private sector lead investment in new digital infrastructure and services provision, with public sector facilitation and intervention where necessary.
- Partnership working – a collaborative approach with relevant partners, from both the private and public sector, will make more of an impact compared to working independently.
- Communication and co-ordination – to support partnership working and also improve links between local groups, communities, organisations and businesses; and with regional partners and the private sector.
- Inclusivity – to help enable residents from under-represented groups and those with multiple barriers to employment play a fuller part in their community.

2.4 1. Digital infrastructure and service provision accessibility

To ensure that Gosport has full fibre and mobile network accessibility and service provision via a range of options the Council will look to the private sector to lead on infrastructure investment, with public sector facilitation and intervention where necessary.

2.5 Therefore via this strategy the Council will:

- Undertake annual infrastructure and provision mapping/monitoring to identify any specific locations that may require a public sector intervention to address connectivity issues.
- Use the planning policy framework to encourage the installation of the latest digital infrastructure and the provision of digital services as part of new development or redevelopment schemes.
- Continue to engage with private sector digital infrastructure and service providers that are investing in the surrounding area to encourage, facilitate and enable (where required) related investment in Gosport.
- Continue to engage with Portsmouth City Council and Hampshire County Council (plus other neighbouring local authorities) to identify and agree any further joint working opportunities for public sector interventions in the provision of new digital infrastructure and services.

2.6 2. Digital inclusion and service provision take-up/usage

Although Gosport is comparatively well served in terms of digital infrastructure there is an issue with take-up/usage of digital services, which is being compounded by the recent Covid-19 pandemic accelerated online channel shift, as outlined in paragraph 1.2.

2.7 Anecdotal feedback and online research shows that a reason for this is some residents, businesses, organisations and groups do not have the skills and/or confidence to do things online. Other reasons amongst residents also include not having access to data and/or a device to do so i.e. the digitally excluded.

2.8 Therefore via this strategy the council will work with partners to:

- Facilitate new and increase take-up of existing digital training for residents, businesses, organisations and groups.
- Utilise community amenities/hubs, particularly in areas of deprivation, for residents to have somewhere local and trusted to get help with getting online e.g. access to data, devices and mentoring to become digitally included.

2.9 3. Digital skills and careers promotion

Related to priority 2 above is the need to highlight the importance of digital skills and related career opportunities amongst both young people and adults. This is not just restricted to jobs in the digital sector but others too as a result of the importance of having digital skills in the increasingly online world of employment, both now and in the future.

2.10 Therefore via this strategy, in addition to the related activities under priority 2, the Council will work with partners to:

- Promote the importance of digital skills (along with other work ready skills) to pupils, students and job seekers.

2.11 4. The Gosport Digital Peninsula Partnership

As with priority 3, establishing this partnership will help achieve the outputs relating to priority 2 e.g. building digital skills and confidence amongst residents, organisations and groups to do more things online; and helping excluded residents to access data and devices.

2.12 Similar partnerships operate elsewhere across the country with training and mentoring delivered by resident, business and community digital champions. Some also offer data 'banks' and devices for excluded residents to access.

2.13 Therefore via this strategy the Council will use the consultation with partners to help identify local needs and potential offers to address them under a partnership umbrella organisation.

2.14 Next Steps

As per the recommendation it is intended to consult with partners e.g. education establishments, social housing providers, employment support organisations, training providers and business support organisations on the draft strategy's priorities and to develop the detailed action plan.

2.15 As part of this consultation we will also seek to ascertain the digital needs of those partners and their clients etc. plus any related funding requirements. In addition to helping to progress this strategy it will also form an important part of bringing forward our UK Shared Prosperity Investment Plan for Gosport. This plan was submitted to the Government for approval in August in order to access £1 million of additional funding for the Borough. It is anticipated that the Government will confirm its decision later in the Autumn.

2.16 These 3 year (2022/23, 2023/24 and 2024/25) government funded plans have 3 priority areas: business support; community and place; and people and skills. The cross-cutting theme for our plan is the digital peninsula concept, as outlined in the Gosport Infrastructure Investment Plan and developed further in this strategy. Therefore the consultation on the draft strategy and the development of the detailed action plan will be incorporated into bringing forward Gosport's UK Shared Prosperity Investment over the next 3 years.

3.0 Risk Assessment

3.1 For the strategy in its current draft format the primary risk is in relation to it not being progressed further as per the recommendations i.e. the consultation exercise being undertaken, the detailed action plan being developed and ultimately implemented.

3.2 The issue is that without this strategy, along with its associated consultation exercise demonstrating local need and support, we may not

be able to take advantage of potential external funding opportunities as and when they arise in the future. In addition it will also make it easier to engage with partners and secure their support in the delivery of its action plan.

4.0 Conclusion

4.1 This report sets out the key elements of ‘Gosport – the Digital Peninsula’ the digital strategy for the borough. Currently in draft form it is intended to undertake a consultation exercise with partners on its priorities and in response to the findings develop a detailed action plan.

4.2 The strategy has been formulated in response to:

- Telecommunications being one of the five priorities identified in the Gosport Infrastructure Investment Plan (2019) to facilitate a step change in the Borough’s economy.
- The Plan also introducing the concept of the Digital Peninsula as a means of attracting residents and businesses to the Borough.
- The Covid-19 pandemic accelerated channel shift towards digital/online customer service delivery and engagement, along with businesses, organisations and groups operating online.

4.3 It will make Gosport a better place to live and work with its digital inclusion focus helping to ensure that more:

- Residents have the skills, confidence and access to data and a device to enable them to at least meet every day needs online.
- Businesses, organisations and groups have the skills and resources to maximise the opportunities arising from operating online.

4.4 Digital inclusion is also the cross-cutting theme for Gosport’s UK Shared Prosperity Investment Plan (2022/23, 2023/24 and 2024/25) that addresses national priorities of business support; community and place; and people and skills. Our plan was submitted to the Government for approval in August in order to access £1 million of additional funding over the three year period. It is anticipated that a decision will be made later in the Autumn.

4.5 As per the report’s recommendation the next step is to consult with partners on the draft strategy’s priorities to develop its detailed action plan. This will help identify local needs and potential offers to address them under the umbrella of the proposed Gosport Digital Peninsula Partnership. It will also help inform the implementation of Gosport’s UK Shared Prosperity Investment Plan.

4.6 Once this consultation has been completed the finalised strategy and detailed action plan will be submitted to a future Board meeting for approval.

Financial Services comments:	
Legal Services comments:	No Comments
Equality and Diversity:	See attached IIA
Climate Change implications:	See attached IIA
Crime and Disorder:	
Service Improvement Plan implications:	
Corporate Plan:	
Risk Assessment:	Contained within the report
Background Papers:	
Appendices:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Gosport the Digital Peninsula Digital Strategy for the Borough 2. Digital Strategy IIA
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