

Gosport – The Digital Peninsula, Gosport’s Digital Strategy

Background Information

This strategy has been formulated in response to:

- Telecommunications being one of the five priorities identified in the Gosport Infrastructure Investment Plan (Solent Local Enterprise Partnership, 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.

Our Digital Vision

Our aim is that Gosport’s residents and businesses 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.

Principles

We will apply the following principles in delivering the priorities of this strategy:

- 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.

Priorities

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

1. Digital infrastructure and service provision accessibility

Regardless of where you live or where your business is based in Gosport you should be able to access the digital connection and service provision that you need to meet your everyday needs, both now and in the future.

Therefore we aim to ensure that Gosport has full fibre and mobile network accessibility and service provision via a range of options that is generally comparable to and competitive with the wider Solent region.

According to the latest available coverage and speed data Gosport is currently well served in terms of digital infrastructure e.g. as per statistics relating to Ofcom broadband availability, Openreach FTTP coverage and Virgin Media cable and speed test results. This means that as stated in the Gosport Infrastructure Investment Plan (2019) the borough “is generally comparable to and competitive with the wider Solent region” [and] “broadband and mobile infrastructure constraints are predominantly limited to peripheral locations within the borough.”

This is because as a mainly urban local authority area i.e. with a relatively large potential customer base Gosport has and continues to be selected as a location for private sector investment in digital infrastructure and digital service provision.

Notwithstanding this public sector interventions have been required to address specific issues, or to help facilitate additional private sector investment in Gosport. As part of this intervention activity the council has participated as a funding partner in local authority partnerships to enable increased investment in Gosport’s digital infrastructure e.g. with

- Hampshire County Council, as part of its Hampshire Superfast Broadband programme; and
- Portsmouth City Council, as part of its My City Wi-Fi project.

Further intervention has also included making council buildings and assets available as part of rolling out digital infrastructure investment programmes. In addition the council has supported the roll-out of related national government initiatives, such as those aimed at increasing SME take-up of digital services e.g.

- Gigabit Broadband Voucher Scheme.
- SuperConnected Cities Programme (as a partner in the Portsmouth scheme).

However advancements in digital connectivity are moving quickly and we need to ensure that Gosport continues to be well served, particularly when roll-outs of next generation digital infrastructure and service provision tend to start with cities or larger urban centres. New players are also entering the cable infrastructure provider market to challenge OpenReach and Virgin Media e.g. Hyperoptic and more locally Toob in Southampton and City Fibre in Portsmouth, with both rolling out their infrastructure investment and service provision offer into the wider city regions.

Therefore it is essential that this digital accessibility is regularly monitored and that private sector infrastructure and service providers, especially those initially investing in Portsmouth and/or Southampton, are engaged with on an ongoing basis so that Gosport continues to be competitive with the wider Solent region.

This will be achieved by the council:

- a) Undertaking annual infrastructure and provision mapping/monitoring to identify any specific locations that may require a public sector intervention to address connectivity issues.

- b) Using 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.
- c) Continuing 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.
- d) Continuing 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. Digital inclusion and service provision take-up/usage

The Covid-19 pandemic saw a significant channel shift to digital customer service delivery and engagement that will continue going forward. Therefore for Gosport residents it is essential that those that can 'self-serve' online are able to do so and that those that cannot are assisted to do so.

This channel shift also saw businesses, organisations and groups having to pivot and operate online, with a number of the resultant changes becoming permanent for reasons of efficiency and taking advantage of the opportunities that arise. However not every business, organisation and group is taking advantage of the potential benefits of operating online e.g. according to the background dataset for the 'Levelling Up Digital Support for Local Businesses' (Maybe, June 2022) only 14% of Gosport businesses have a social media presence and 1.2% are active on social media.

As a result the key issue for this strategy is how to increase the number of residents, businesses, organisations and groups across the borough that are actively online. At a high level this will include the following initiatives:

Residents

- Training and mentoring so that all residents have at least the essential digital skills for both life and work.
- Community support, particularly in areas of deprivation, so that all residents have somewhere local and trusted to get help with digital inclusion.
- Community hubs providing access to data and devices for excluded residents, such as those on low income and those that are vulnerable adults, to get online to meet every day needs e.g. applying for benefits; finding and applying for jobs; and connecting to people. Users will be able to access both digital skills training/mentoring and a device if needed.

Businesses, organisations and groups

- Training and mentoring so that businesses, organisations and groups have the skills to operate online.
- Maximising take-up of existing related national and regional support and implementing new support measures via Gosport's UK Shared Prosperity Investment Plan.

This will be achieved by the council:

- a) Having digital technology as the overarching theme for its UK Shared Prosperity Fund Investment Plan activities i.e. cutting across the supporting local businesses; community and place; and people and skills priorities.
- b) Working in partnership with Hampshire County Council, social housing providers, the DWP, education establishments and employment support organisations to facilitate the delivery of digital skills related training and related support initiatives e.g. mentoring and access to devices etc.
- c) Establishing the Gosport Digital Peninsula Partnership to lead on the implementation and promotion of advice and support to residents and businesses etc.

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.

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.

4. The Gosport Digital Peninsula Partnership

The Gosport Digital Peninsula Partnership will focus on building digital skills and confidence so any resident, business, organisation or group in Gosport can make the most of the digital opportunities available to them.

Any resident, business, organisation or group who wants to help address digital exclusion and digital skills issues in Gosport is welcome to join the partnership.

Training and mentoring via:

- Resident, business and community digital champions
- Incorporating existing training and support provision to increase take-up

To help increase the number of:

- Residents that are active online and meeting everyday needs by being so.
- Businesses, organisations or groups that are active online.

Monitoring and evaluation

The measures of success will include:

- Numbers of residents participating in digital skills training courses.
- Numbers of residents

- Numbers of businesses participating in digital skills training.
- Numbers of community hubs offering access and support to residents.
- Numbers of residents gaining access to the internet via community hubs.
- Creation of the Gosport Digital Peninsula Partnership.

We will explore options of using a social value tool to also measure and quantify in monetary terms the impact of the strategy.

Delivery

The successful delivery of this strategy and its associated action plan, whilst lead by Gosport Borough Council, will be achieved via partnership working.