

**HOUSING AND INFRASTRUCTURE BOARD**

**22<sup>ND</sup> October 2020**

**SCR DIGITAL INFRASTRUCTURE STRATEGY UPDATE**

**Purpose of Report**

To summarise the early findings of the SCR Digital Infrastructure Strategy commission and to approve the recommended actions for the next stages leading to the delivery of the final draft report.

**Thematic Priority**

This report relates to the following Strategic Economic Plan priorities:

Secure investment in infrastructure where it will do most to support growth

**Freedom of Information**

The paper will be available under the Combined Authority Publication Scheme.

**Recommendations**

The Board is asked to:

1. Comment on the emerging findings of the initial phase of the Strategy development.
2. Note and provide comment on the proposed next steps in preparing the SCR Digital Infrastructure Strategy.

**1. Introduction**

- 1.1 In January 2020, the Infrastructure Board approved the proposal to commission the preparation of a Sheffield City Region (SCR) Digital Infrastructure Strategy. Following a procurement exercise Arcadis were appointed and commenced work in June 2020.
- 1.2 This report and presentation provide an update and key findings on the initial phase of the work and outlines the next steps in preparing the Strategy itself.

**2. Proposal and justification**

- 2.1 The principle objectives of the commission are to:
  1. Provide a 'reality check' of the Market and stakeholder needs.
  2. Check and challenge the South Yorkshire Digital Connectivity Strategy and proposed interventions.

3. Prepare a consistent and evidence based SCR Digital Infrastructure Strategy and identify early interventions.
  4. Providing an assessment of public assets with the potential to support full fibre and 5G roll-out.
  5. Providing guidance and advocacy to raise SCR's profile with Government and better access Government investment.
- 2.2** Since their appointment Arcadis have undertaken over 70 interviews with stakeholders to obtain the views of both the industry and wider stakeholders on how the City Region could best support the digital infrastructure needs for a growing economy. These included discussions with the four South Yorkshire Local Authorities; public bodies such as the NHS and Police and Fire Services, as well as digital infrastructure providers and other private sector companies
- 2.3** Arcadis have also reviewed the Superfast South Yorkshire Digital Connectivity Strategy, prepared by the four local authorities in 2019 to inform the preparation of the SCR Strategic Economic Plan, as well as the previous SCR Digital Action Plan (2018). Furthermore, the consultant reviewed previous unsuccessful funding submissions for Government funding to better understand how we could improve funding bids in the future.
- 2.4** A summary of the interim findings were recently presented to the Superfast South Yorkshire Board, which comprises officers from all four local authorities, and which is acting as a 'Sounding Board' for the preparation of the Strategy. The Board were generally supportive of the key findings and will continue to be engaged in the development of the Strategy.
- 2.5** The presentation at Appendix 1 outlines the key findings to date and sets out the approach to the next phase of the commission.

In summary the key findings are:

- Overall, the fundamental ambitions of the Superfast South Yorkshire Digital Connectivity Strategy remain sound.
- Superfast South Yorkshire (SFSY) has been a successful demonstration of regional collaboration.
- All four mobile operators have deployed 5G in the SCR region (largely in Sheffield) and plan to extend coverage over the next two years.
- Whilst there is much cause for optimism, digital activity and supporting policies vary across the individual Authority areas, leading to fragmentation and a lack of strategic consistency. A tangible set of shared objectives and clear governance and alignment to an overall SCR wide strategic approach would simplify operator engagement and deliver shared efficiencies.
- Whilst SCR have the ambition to reset DCMS perception of the region as a place to invest, a strong evidence base is key to evidencing market failure and therefore the case for state intervention
- Access to public sector assets such as rooftops, street furniture and ducting can greatly assist operators in building their networks, but it should not be regarded as a major revenue source for the public sector
- Where Local Authority assets can play a role though is through 'Anchor Tenancy' models which emerged from urban fibre LFFN initiatives and may be equally appropriate to enabling the imminent investment in rural fibre broadband
- The SCR has an active but fragmented digital industries sector and a strong narrative could be created with some focussed resource and minimal investment.

**2.6** The next phase of work includes:

- Compiling the evidence base and analysis / mapping
- Mapping public assets and overlaying with industry roll-out plans and other data sources
- Continuing discussions with industry and other stakeholders on early interventions
- Engagement with DCMS
- Start drafting the Strategy document

**2.7** It is intended that a draft strategy be ready for engagement with partners and stakeholders by the end of the year for consideration by this Board at its next meeting on the 7<sup>th</sup> January 2021.

### **3. Consideration of alternative approaches**

**3.1** Alternative approaches and options are being considered as part of developing the Strategy to inform the preferred strategic aims, objectives, outputs and outcomes.

### **4. Implications**

#### **4.1 Financial**

All activities set out in this report will be delivered from within existing resources. Where any further external work needs to be commissioned, funds for this will need to be identified.

#### **4.2 Legal**

None as a direct result of this report.

#### **4.3 Risk Management**

Key risks are:

- Individual authorities not engaging or unable to support elements of the work; however to date engagement has been high.
- Disagreements between individual planning authorities on any potential contentious issues.

#### **4.4 Equality, Diversity and Social Inclusion**

Ensuring digital inclusion for all will be a key purpose of the Digital Infrastructure Strategy, aligning with the intentions of the Equality Act and Public Sector Equality Duty and the inclusivity policy approach of the SCR Strategic Economic Plan. The work programme set out above is designed to enhance and support work at the local level by adding value and creating some economies of scale.

### **5. Communications**

**5.1** Engagement and consultation opportunities are key components in the development of the Strategy. The final approved document can be publicised later in 2021 once completed and approved.

### **6. Appendices/Annexes**

**6.1** Appendix 1 – SCR Digital Infrastructure Strategy Initial Findings Presentation

<b>REPORT AUTHOR</b>	<b>Laurie Thomas</b>
<b>POST</b>	<b>Senior Programme Manager (Infrastructure)</b>
Officer responsible	Mark Lynam
Organisation	<b>Sheffield City Region</b>
Email	<b>Mark.lynam@sheffieldcityregion.org.uk</b>
Telephone	<b>0114 2203445</b>

Background papers used in the preparation of this report are available for inspection at: 11 Broad Street West, Sheffield S1 2BQ

Other sources and references: