

Mayoral Combined Authority Board

20 September 2021

Draft South Yorkshire Digital Infrastructure Strategy

Is the paper exempt from the press and public?	No
Purpose of this report:	Policy Decision
Funding Stream:	Not applicable
Is this a Key Decision?	Yes
Has it been included on the Forward Plan?	Yes

Director Approving Submission of the Report:

Martin Swales, Interim Director of Transport, Housing and Infrastructure

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Executive Summary:

To consider and approve the Draft South Yorkshire Digital Infrastructure Strategy

What does this mean for businesses, people and places in South Yorkshire?

If implemented the Strategy would help improve business productivity and competitiveness; address digital exclusion and digital poverty; and make South Yorkshire places more attractive to inward investors and as places to live and work.

Recommendations:

The Board is asked to:

- Consider and approve the Draft South Yorkshire Digital Infrastructure Strategy;
- Delegate to the Head of Paid Service in liaison with the Housing and Infrastructure Board Co-Chairs to sign off the final designed document; and
- Request that the Housing and Infrastructure Board prepares a Delivery Plan for the Digital Infrastructure Strategy.

Consideration by any other Board, Committee, Assurance or Advisory Panel

Housing and Infrastructure Board
Local Enterprise Partnership

22 June 2021

09 September 2021

1. Background

- 1.1 The consultant Arcadis was commissioned in 2020 to support the Mayoral Combined Authority and partners to prepare a South Yorkshire Digital Infrastructure Strategy. The Strategy would provide a single strategic integrated approach to delivering the Strategic Economic Plan's (SEP) ambitions for gigabit broadband services across South Yorkshire, providing the core digital infrastructure networks, including 5G connectivity, to enable greater business competitiveness, social inclusion and environmental sustainability.
- 1.2 This report presents the Final Draft Strategy which has been developed and is recommended by the Housing and Infrastructure Board for consideration and approval by the MCA. The LEP Board also supports and has endorsed the Draft Strategy.

2. Key Issues

- 2.1 This Digital Infrastructure Strategy is part of, and covers, one of three key areas of activity critical to providing a strategic approach to addressing the digital agenda across South Yorkshire in an integrated way to deliver the SEP's digital ambitions. The other two elements being digital skills and digital innovation and business support.
- 2.2 The SEP sets out a clear expectation of how digital will contribute to the wider economic and innovation objectives and sets the ambition for the region to "*...be recognised as one of the best-connected city regions in the country where coverage, choice, and speed of communication stays ahead of demand...Enhanced digital connectivity and skills enable people to use digital applications and solutions to improve their lives and to sustain, grow, and create new businesses*"
- 2.3 The Strategy provides the proposed strategic approach to accelerating the development of 'gigabit capable' digital infrastructure networks across the whole of South Yorkshire and includes proposals for public interventions support achieving this strategic ambition; building on the success of the existing Superfast South Yorkshire broadband programme which has achieved over 98% superfast broadband coverage.
- 2.4 There are a range of key challenges that the Strategy seeks to address including:
 - Around 160,000 premises in South Yorkshire (20% of total premises) are not scheduled to receive 'gigabit-capable' broadband by the industry over the next 5 years.
 - To build on the success of the Superfast South Yorkshire (SFSY) broadband programme in now rolling-out gigabit broadband connectivity throughout South Yorkshire.
 - A more consistent regional approach for 5G including ensuring local businesses are aware of and exploit 5G opportunities.

- Addressing digital poverty and the affordability of broadband services, which remain barriers to social and economic inclusion.

2.5 The Strategy will seek to put in place the digital infrastructure and connectivity 'foundations' to address the above challenges and support the digital inclusion, digital skills and digital business innovation agendas.

2.6 The Housing and Infrastructure Board has begun to consider the next stages in delivering the Strategy. Appendix A provides an indication of the types of activities to implement the Strategy that the Board will be taking into account in developing a Delivery Plan.

3. Options Considered and Recommended Proposal

3.1 Option 1

To adopt the South Yorkshire Digital Infrastructure Strategy. Strategic policy and delivery options have been considered through the preparation process.

3.2 Option 1 Risks and Mitigations

The key risks relate to the implementation of the Strategy as follows:

- Delivery partners are unable to commit to implementing the Strategy once completed. Collaborative working in the development stage of the strategy should mitigate this as controversial issues have been raised and responded to early, but the implementation of the strategy may carry additional risks, still to be considered.
- The digital 'Market' evolves so rapidly that the Strategy becomes outdated and irrelevant. Engaging a specialist digital consultant with 'Market' knowledge and experience has ensured the Strategy is up-to-date and 'future proofed.'
- Insufficient public and private funding and investment to implement the Strategy in a timely manner to meet the Strategy's delivery targets. A public funding source has been identified to support implementation of both the Strategy and the wider digital agenda, and the MCA Executive and local authorities continue to liaise and support digital infrastructure providers in delivering their roll-out plans.

3.3 Option 2

To not adopt the South Yorkshire Digital Infrastructure Strategy

3.4 Option 2 Risks and Mitigations

The key risk with this option is that there would continue to be no consistent approach adopted across South Yorkshire to address the digital infrastructure challenges and SEP digital ambitions over the next 5-10 years. There are limited mitigations for this option and therefore option 1 is being recommended.

3.5 Recommended Option

Option 1 is the preferred option to pursue.

4. Consultation on Proposal

4.1 The Housing and Infrastructure Board has overseen the Strategy's preparation with the Superfast South Yorkshire Programme Board acting as an Advisory Group at key stages. Members of the Local Enterprise Partnership have provided a broader business input to its development.

5. Timetable and Accountability for Implementing this Decision:

- 5.1 The Draft Strategy is presented for the MCAs comments and approval.

6. Financial and Procurement Implications and Advice

- 6.1 There are no direct financial and procurement issues arising directly from this report. However, implementation of the Strategy will require financial and other resources, particularly within the MCA and local authorities, which have not yet been confirmed, although options are being explored

7. Legal Implications and Advice

- 7.1 There are no direct legal issues arising from this report.

8. Human Resources Implications and Advice

- 8.1 Consideration will need to be given to the resources for implementing the Strategy, including the roles and resource requirements of the MCA.

9. Equality and Diversity Implications and Advice

- 9.1 Ensuring digital inclusion for all is a key purpose of the Draft Strategy, aligning with the intentions of the Equality Act and Public Sector Equality Duty and the inclusivity policy approach of the Strategic Economic Plan.

10. Climate Change Implications and Advice

- 10.1 The Covid19 lockdown has shown the importance of good digital connectivity, particularly in relation to enabling people to effectively work from home, where possible, and access public health and other services online. A positive consequence of this has been a reduction in travelling and related pollution. Improved digital infrastructure / connectivity could therefore have a significant role in meeting net zero reduction targets related to transport.

11. Information and Communication Technology Implications and Advice

- 11.1 There are no IT issues as a direct result of this report.

12. Communications and Marketing Implications and Advice. Please also refer to consultation undertaken as per Section 4:

- 12.1 The final approved document is aimed to be published later in 2021 following design work. There may be media opportunities related to interventions that are delivered to implement the Strategy.

List of Appendices Included

- A A Framework for the Delivery Plan
B Draft South Yorkshire Digital Infrastructure Strategy

Background Papers

None

Appendix A

A Framework for the Delivery Plan

It is proposed that the Housing and Infrastructure Board develops a costed Delivery Plan to implement the Strategy. This should include realistic delivery timescales and specify early digital infrastructure interventions and activities to maximise the economic and social benefits this would bring, as well as setting the longer term coherent and joined-up Plan for delivering the SEP digital ambitions.

Delivery will be subject to resources being available to implement proposed actions, so will need to prioritise and reflect likely available resources over time both locally and in working with DCMS. It will therefore need to prioritise and focus on those activities where market failure exists, and public interventions are required to deliver or stimulate the 'market' to deliver the Strategy.

It will also need to be cognisant of and complementary to the strategic policies and actions being similarly developed for digital skills, and digital innovation and business support by the MCA and partners.

The Strategy's Vision is dependent on delivering five key policy 'Goals:'

1. Ensure South Yorkshire's superfast broadband and 4G success is repeated for Gigabit broadband and 5G
2. Support the social and economic priorities set out in the SEP.
3. Form an inclusive platform that enables better outcomes for all sections of society.
4. Be supported by the Governance and data-driven approach needed to maximise the digital potential of South Yorkshire
5. Position South Yorkshire as a leading centre of applied digital innovation and adoption.

The types of implementation activities and interventions this could involve include:

Strategic Goal	Potential Activities and interventions
1. Ensure South Yorkshire's superfast broadband and 4G success is repeated for Gigabit broadband and 5G	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Utilise public assets across South Yorkshire, including buildings and street furniture, to facilitate further 4G and 5G coverage;• Undertake periodic 'Market' engagements to track progress by the industry in rolling-out mobile coverage• Provide interventions where appropriate to incentivise or encourage industry to accelerate delivery.
2. Support the social and economic priorities set out in the SEP.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Consider methods to check real-time mobile coverage to identify coverage gaps• Encourage industry, and intervene where necessary, to fill these gaps• Work with local businesses to explore the potential to develop new innovative private 5G networks to meet the challenges and opportunities of individual businesses.• Encourage and support new innovations such as Yorkshire Water's proposals to deploy fibre in water to access poorly served communities.
3. Form an inclusive platform that enables better outcomes for all sections of society.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Support the DCMS Project Gigabit (£61m - £103m) Programme in South Yorkshire

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Utilising appropriate public facilities and housing as anchors to encourage and enable the industry to roll-out gigabit coverage to the 160,000 premises currently not scheduled to be connected by 2025. • Undertake research to fill the information gap relating to the real extent of digital poverty in South Yorkshire, and the actions to address this.
4. Be supported by the Governance and data-driven approach needed to maximise the digital potential of South Yorkshire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish a Digital Forum comprising representatives from the public sector, local businesses and digital infrastructure providers • Commission and utilise consistent data sources to inform policy, delivery, and funding bids and programmes • Adopt consistent planning policies and 'barrier busting' approaches/measures across South Yorkshire to support and accelerate industry roll-outs.
6. Position South Yorkshire as a leading centre of applied digital innovation and adoption.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider the SEP innovation cluster areas for the early roll-out of private 5G and edge datacentre capability • Develop and implement pilot innovation projects across South Yorkshire in liaison with DCMS and local partners