

# HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

## Decision Report

<b>Decision Maker:</b>	Cabinet
<b>Date:</b>	6 February 2024
<b>Title:</b>	Digital Hampshire: Future Strategy
<b>Report From:</b>	Director of Hampshire 2050

**Contact name:** Emma Noyce

**Email:** Emma.noyce@hants.gov.uk

### Purpose of this Report

1. The aim of this paper is to consider the future approach to the County Council's strategy for Hampshire as a Digital Place.
2. The paper focuses primarily on the 'outward' facing elements of Hampshire as a Digital Place and aims to compliment and partner, but not duplicate, the more internally focused work already in progress as part of Hampshire's Digital Business Strategy. It explores the role and responsibilities of Hampshire County Council in supporting a digital Hampshire.

### Recommendations

3. That Cabinet confirms the County Council's future role and responsibility for Digital, including a creating a greater operational distance between the systems leadership role and the operational ownership and responsibility for infrastructure delivery. The future strategic responsibility is defined as:  
Digital Inclusion:  
A duty to ensure that our residents have the skills, knowledge and confidence to access our services safely online, through providing an improved 'digital front door' and providing an appropriate 'physical front door' to enable people to engage with our digital organisation.  
  
Digital Infrastructure:  
To enable suppliers to invest in Hampshire's digital infrastructure by facilitating relationships, providing reasonable access to the information we hold and promoting the communications of our partners.

### Systems Leadership:

To use our influence to convene (and, where appropriate, lead) partnerships to enable collective action on shared strategic priorities.

4. That Cabinet endorses the County Council's support for the development of a Digital Place Strategy for Hampshire.

### **Executive Summary**

5. On 12 December 2023 a paper was brought to Cabinet considering Hampshire's previous role in delivering the Superfast Broadband and marking the closure of this phase of activity. This report moves the discussion onwards and looks to the future – noting that what is needed going forward will be different to what was required in the past.
6. The paper describes the importance of digital connectivity and inclusion in the context of the future prosperity of Hampshire and the wellbeing of its residents. It considers three key themes: Inclusion, Infrastructure and Systems Leadership; and seeks to articulate Hampshire County Council's role in respect of each.
7. The report notes the direct responsibilities of Hampshire County Council, but also recognises that the County Council is just one contributor in a much broader collective of public, charitable and private sector organisations. It therefore resets the County Council's position and clarifies the difference between the direct operational responsibilities of the County Council and our role in terms of systems leadership and partnership working.

### **Contextual information**

8. In December 2023, Cabinet considered a paper on the closure of the Superfast Broadband Programme in Hampshire. This paper set out the achievements of the programme and the benefits it had delivered. Officers agreed to bring a further paper to Cabinet to consider Hampshire's future approach as part of a Digital Place Strategy and utilise this as an opportunity to "re-set" the County Council's role in the digital future of Hampshire.
9. A Digital Place strategy addresses how people, businesses and places operate in a digital world: making the most of technology and new ways of thinking, doing things differently and, ultimately, shaping places and connecting communities.
10. The Hampshire 2050 Vision recognises 'changing technology' as a key cross-cutting theme. The Vision statement explains:

*“Hampshire should take advantage of the opportunities of technology to people, place and economy; maximising the benefits whilst mitigating against the negative impacts.”*

11. Connected communities, digital inclusion, prosperity and economic competitiveness are key themes running through the Serving Hampshire Strategic Plan. The [Hampshire Economic Strategy](#) highlights digital connectivity as well as digital skills for the future as one of the key issues affecting Hampshire's current and future economic success. Meanwhile, one key enabler for the successful delivery of the [Public Health Strategy](#) will be a digitally connected and digitally literate population.
12. A digital strategy will also support the County Council's agreed stated ambition that where appropriate resident services will be online by default, with appropriate alternatives available where required.
13. The importance of 'digital place' is therefore well understood. The question is, what is Hampshire County Council's role and responsibility in developing and shaping this future? The establishment of the Hampshire 2050 Directorate, our one organisation approach and our strategic leadership function provide a new opportunity to answer this question. This paper explores the relationship between residents, businesses and the public realm in a digital world, and is intended to provoke discussion about the specific role of Hampshire County Council in this landscape. It is also set in the context of the recently agreed financial principles through which the Savings Programme to 2025 has been recently developed:
  - resources will be focussed on statutory and critical services
  - discretionary preventative services will only be provided where there is a clear and demonstrable longer term value for money business case
  - resident services to be online by default, with appropriate alternatives available where required
  - enabling functions to be provided as efficiently and effectively as possible from the centre of the organisation at a level sufficient to provide an adequate level of corporate governance and informed decision making
  - discretionary service areas must have a strong rationale for being delivered and need to be cost neutral. Fees and charges to be increased if this allows a discretionary service to continue
14. As part of the exploration of the role the County Council is already playing, two 'Digital Place' workshops have been held with colleagues drawn from all Directorates. Further discussions have been held with the Assistant Director for IT and the Head of LM&D to ensure the Digital Place Strategy sits comfortably with the County Council's Digital Business Strategy and the Digital Employee work respectively. CMT have also had the opportunity to consider the areas raised in this report.

15. This work has identified that there is already a range of activity taking place across the authority. This work is undoubtedly delivering value, but there is an opportunity to develop a more strategic approach, improving the integration of different agendas and better defining our role.
16. Current activity across the organisation can be broadly broken down into three areas:
  - Digital Inclusion
  - Digital Connectivity and Infrastructure
  - Systems leadership

### **Digital Inclusion: ‘No one is left behind’**

17. Digital Equity is, unsurprisingly, a critical issue for society:

*“A lack of digital skills and access can have a huge negative impact on a person’s life, leading to poorer health outcomes and a lower life expectancy, increased loneliness and social isolation, less access to jobs and education.*

*It can mean paying more for essentials, financial exclusion, an increased risk of experiencing poverty. People who are digitally excluded also lack a voice and visibility in the modern world, as government services and democracy increasingly move online.*

*What’s more, it’s those already at a disadvantage – through age, education, income, disability, or unemployment – who are most likely to be missing out, further widening the social inequality gap.”<sup>1</sup>*

18. It’s also a big issue for Government and Industry. The House of Lords issued [report](#) making a strong case for government intervention, noting that basic digital capability is set to become the UK’s biggest skills gap by 2030.
19. It is no surprise, therefore, that Digital Inclusion is a key priority for many parts of our organisation – with activity mainly focusing on the provision of Access, Skills and Support. These digital inclusion activities are recognised as enablers for a number of statutory functions. The critical drivers for the County Council’s activity can broadly be characterised as follows:
  - to enable our residents to live happy, healthy and independent lives; reducing the pressure on County Council services and helping them to stay safe in an online world
  - to support a prosperous Hampshire with an appropriately skilled and engaged workforce, which will ensure both inclusive access to Digital jobs

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<sup>1</sup> [The digital divide - Good Things Foundation](#)

today and into the future, as well as making Hampshire a place to attract inward investment and jobs

- to facilitate our move to a digital organisation; enabling residents and communities across Hampshire to continue to access services and digital delivery models

20. There is some superb Digital Inclusion work going on across the organisation, but this information can be difficult to find or access – either hidden in our webpages or provided in face-to-face settings by those individual staff who are skilled and confident in offering support. In moving to a delivery model which is ‘digital by default’ there is an opportunity to take an organisational view of both our ‘digital front door’, but also how we offer a physical front door to a digital world through our service provision.
21. However, this is also a congested landscape. All over Hampshire, businesses, third sector organisations, local authorities and individuals are offering support for the digitally excluded – no surprise when it’s such a critical societal and commercial issue. However, there is a real opportunity, particularly around skills provision, to develop a more joined up and strategic approach to the commissioning of digital skills programmes for employability; inclusion and wellbeing.

### **Digital Infrastructure: ‘No place is left behind’**

22. Between 2014 and 2023, Hampshire County Council ran a Superfast Broadband project in partnership with BDUK (the Government’s executive agency for digital infrastructure). This programme has been highly successful. It has increased coverage in Hampshire from 80% to 97.8%, supporting 115,000 households and businesses to access superfast broadband; households which the market would have ‘left behind’ as non-commercially viable. This programme has delivered £7.2m in Gainshare payments to the County Council. As well as the crucial role in enabling infrastructure, the importance of the wider support provided by the County Council to enable these ‘left behind’ communities to take up the connectivity provided was pivotal in encouraging uptake.
23. The Superfast Broadband programme has now formally closed, with just the administration of approved voucher payments to oversee for the next year or so. Superfast has been replaced by Project Gigabit. Unlike Superfast Broadband, Project Gigabit is based on a direct relationship between BDUK and suppliers.
24. The County Council has not got a direct financial involvement and there is no longer a statutory role or contractual requirement to support infrastructure roll out. However, there is a clear desire from BDUK to work in collaboration with

Councils, recognising that [Local Authorities and Councillors](#) have ‘vital local levers that can help fast track broadband roll-out to rural communities’, and can help to problem solve delivery issues. Discussions with BDUK have indicated that, as a minimum, they would ask for support in the promotion of programme communications with residents, and support in unlocking build issues which relate directly to the County Council’s statutory responsibilities (e.g. Highways).

25. Furthermore, the Gigabit Broadband Voucher payment scheme provides an opportunity for those premises not in scope of the Project Gigabit procurement to work directly with suppliers to purchase a connection.
26. Again, whilst there is not a direct responsibility for the County Council to administer the scheme, the promotion, support and information provided by the Local Authority has been crucial to enabling communities to understand and take advantage of the opportunity. It is estimated that there are approximately 22,000 of the county’s most hard to reach properties which are not included in project Gigabit due to viability issues, and therefore, these properties would be reliant on the voucher scheme for future connectivity.
27. Broadband provision is not the only digital infrastructure consideration for Hampshire. Many other local authorities are devoting resource to regional connectivity and wireless technologies. In each of these cases, whilst it is probable that the market will eventually provide, a strategic decision has been made to invest, enable and encourage in order to pump-prime economic growth and ensure that ‘their place’ is the one which the market prioritises. In nearly all of these examples, activity is funded through Gainshare reserves.

### **Systems Leadership: working in collaboration for Hampshire**

28. Digital change affects everyone and everything. There are few clearer cases demanding a systems leadership approach than this, and this is increasingly recognised by a range of organisations – for example, NHS England has just published its new [Framework for Digital Inclusion](#) as part of its strategy to reduce health inequalities – this reduction being a statutory duty for the NHS and ICBs. This strategy talks to the importance of collaboration and cross-discipline partnership.
29. And the systems leadership approach isn’t just about the public sector working together. Digital connectivity is increasingly recognised as a basic utility in the modern world, and therefore this systems leadership approach is also about working constructively with the market – recognising that we don’t have a direct role, but we may have an opportunity to influence as appropriate. It is very likely that businesses in the technology and telecoms sectors are much better equipped than us to solve key digital challenges, but

we can have a role as enablers, creating the conditions to make investment attractive.

30. There may be future opportunities for the County Council to directly invest in digital infrastructure where there is currently no market led provision. However, any future decision would need to align to the agreed financial principles of any capital investment or revenue funding needing to generate a direct positive net financial return to the County Council.
31. As well as the collective power and influence that working in partnership brings, there is a specific issue around how we could together make better use of our data and intelligence to better inform our digital strategies. For example, every organisation in Hampshire will be concerned about digital exclusion – either from a commercial or a societal perspective. However, we do not have a single, evidence-based view on how and why Hampshire’s population is excluded, and how this varies across our geography. By working collectively, we could have a better understanding of the causes of digital exclusion in any given place or population, and then more effectively target activity to address it.
32. A systems approach of this sort would be most effective under a structure of strategic governance and infrastructure funding, which many areas across England have been developed in Devolution Governance and Combined Authorities. In the absence of this formal structure in Hampshire, there may be other ways to build constructive partnerships - for example through the disaggregation of the LEPs. Whilst there is little certainty about the future in this regard, it is conceivable that a business led Economy and Skills Board could have a role in setting strategic priorities and overseeing delivery – perhaps feeding into the wider Hampshire 2050 Partnership Board. This may provide new opportunities for improved co-ordination and collaboration across the region.

### **Working towards a Digital Place Strategy**

33. The three areas of focus as set out above set out a helpful strategic framework for future activity. However, none of what was described above is the sole province of the County Council and it is important to reflect on those areas which are the direct role and responsibility of the County Council, versus those areas which may be better delivered by other organisations or the private sector.
34. Table 1 identifies officers’ assessment of those things which best reflect the specific role and responsibility of Hampshire County Council:

*Table 1:*

<b>Role:</b>	<b>Key responsibilities</b>
<p><u>Digital Inclusion:</u> A duty to ensure that our residents have the skills, knowledge and confidence to access our services safely online, through providing an improved 'digital front door' and providing an appropriate 'physical front door' to enable people to engage with us as a digital organisation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensuring that our services are digitally accessible and providing appropriate support/signposting to enable residents to use them safely.</li> <li>• Understanding the nature of the 'physical front door' to our services (for example identifying the digital support component of a community hub offer).</li> <li>• Enabling better join up across the organisation to improve efficiency, remove duplication, share best practice and better communicate digital inclusion work.</li> <li>• Working in partnership with other organisations to promote online safety, specifically in accordance with our Prevent Duty.</li> <li>• Development of a 'Digital Skills' strategy and action plan for Hampshire which clearly outlines our ambition, actions, and impact.</li> </ul>
<p><u>Digital Infrastructure:</u> Our role is to enable suppliers to invest in Hampshire's digital infrastructure by facilitating relationships and communicating opportunity.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supporting the administration of the Project Gigabit Voucher Scheme through completing the administration of vouchers already approved and signposting residents to future voucher opportunities.</li> <li>• Communicating future Project Gigabit activity within Hampshire, providing access to information that Hampshire holds and facilitating join-up between suppliers and key organisations or services.</li> <li>• Co-ordinating activity within Hampshire County Council to ensure Hampshire is an easy place to 'do business'.</li> </ul>
<p><u>Systems Leadership:</u> Our role is to use our influence to convene (and, where appropriate, lead) partnerships to enable collective action and strategic priorities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitating partnerships and joint working to ensure Hampshire is an easy place to 'do digital' through the Hampshire 2050 Partnership, Economy and Skills Board and other mechanisms.</li> </ul>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognising the future need for digital infrastructure and building this into our planning and delivery where appropriate.</li> <li>• Improving our use of data and evidence to inform priorities and action.</li> <li>• Identifying opportunities for improved regional collaboration e.g. skills and employment.</li> </ul>
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## Finance and Resourcing

35. The Superfast Broadband Programme, at its height, required a small team to facilitate the procurement and contract management of the Openreach build, deal with a range of technical issues, manage a volume of data, support communities to access voucher schemes and lead public communications.
36. The Superfast Programme contract has now been formally closed, albeit with some legacy activity to complete. Hampshire County Council does not receive any funding for supporting Project Gigabit or associated activity, and all resourcing decisions need to be considered in the context of the financial principles set out in paragraph 11.
37. This report describes two different areas of responsibility for the county council. Firstly, our operational role in supporting the functional delivery of digital inclusion and digital infrastructure activity, where these activities link directly our specific role as an upper tier local authority. Secondly, our strategic role in systems leadership – acting in partnership with others and working collectively with others to ensure the best possible digital future for Hampshire.
38. This work is truly cross-cutting; it relates to all parts of the organisation and is the responsibility of everyone. Whilst the Hampshire 2050 Directorate maintains strategic oversight, digital thinking should be embedded across all directorates – in much the same way as we would expect for Climate Change or Inclusion. However, this embedded approach requires a degree of organisational maturity and so, initially, dedicated resource will be required to develop this maturity; to provide drive and direction, ensure activity is delivered as efficiently as possible and is appropriately prioritised. One-off funding is available to support this initial phase of activity.
39. As part of the scope of the Hampshire 2050 Organisational redesign project, consideration will be given to how this work needs to be built into the future structure of the Hampshire 2050 Directorate.

## **Consultation and Equalities**

40. As described in the report, the development of a digital strategy is likely to have had a positive impact across a range of protected characteristics (as defined by the Equality Act 2010) including for people living with disabilities and people of all ages. Individual Equalities Impact Assessments will be developed for any activities which are taken forward.

## **Climate Change Impact Assessments**

41. Hampshire County Council utilises two decision-making tools to assess the carbon emissions and resilience of its projects and decisions. These tools provide a clear, robust, and transparent way of assessing how projects, policies and initiatives contribute towards the County Council's climate change targets of being carbon neutral and resilient to the impacts of a 2°C temperature rise by 2050. This process ensures that climate change considerations are built into everything the Authority does.
42. This paper considers the County Council's strategic approach to Digital Hampshire and, as such, encompasses a varied programme of work. Individual Climate Change Impact Assessments will be developed for specific projects where they proceed. However, it is likely that the outcomes of any Digital Strategy could provide opportunities to support both adaptation and resilience in Hampshire.

## **Conclusions**

43. A good digital future for Hampshire means that our residents will be happier, healthier and better off and our businesses will prosper. This digital future is the responsibility of everyone – across every sector; public and private.
44. The County Council is a key stakeholder in this but will be re-setting its role and creating a greater operational distance between the systems leadership role and the operational ownership and responsibility for infrastructure delivery. Developing a digital place strategy will enable the County Council to better define its own role in shaping Hampshire's digital future, and better engage with partners as part of a systems leadership approach.
45. To enable this, it is recommended that resource be allocated to develop and refine the Digital Place Strategy for Hampshire County Council as outlined in paragraph 33, engaging with partners and establishing a programme of work which can then be embedded across the organisation.

**REQUIRED CORPORATE AND LEGAL INFORMATION:**

**Links to the Strategic Plan**

Hampshire maintains strong and sustainable economic growth and prosperity:	yes
People in Hampshire live safe, healthy and independent lives:	yes
People in Hampshire enjoy a rich and diverse environment:	yes
People in Hampshire enjoy being part of strong, inclusive communities:	yes

**Other Significant Links**

<b>Links to previous Member decisions:</b>	
<u>Title</u> <a href="https://www.hants.gov.uk">Superfast Broadband - Project Conclusion-2023-12-12-Cabinet (hants.gov.uk)</a>	<u>Date</u> 12 December 2023
<b>Direct links to specific legislation or Government Directives</b>	
<u>Title</u>	<u>Date</u>

**Section 100 D - Local Government Act 1972 - background documents**

The following documents discuss facts or matters on which this report, or an important part of it, is based and have been relied upon to a material extent in the preparation of this report. (NB: the list excludes published works and any documents which disclose exempt or confidential information as defined in the Act.)

Document

Location

None

## **EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT:**

### **1. Equality Duty**

The County Council has a duty under Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 ('the Act') to have due regard in the exercise of its functions to the need to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by or under the Act with regard to the protected characteristics as set out in section 4 of the Act (age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation);
- Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic within section 149(7) of the Act (age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation) and those who do not share it;
- Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic within section 149(7) of the Act (see above) and persons who do not share it.

Due regard in this context involves having due regard in particular to:

- The need to remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by persons sharing a relevant characteristic connected to that characteristic;
- Take steps to meet the needs of persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic different from the needs of persons who do not share it;
- Encourage persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity which participation by such persons is disproportionately low.

### **2. Equalities Impact Assessment:**

This is paper forms part of a strategic discussion linked to a Digital Strategy for Hampshire. Individual Equalities Impact Assessments will be developed for any activities which are taken forward.