Agenda item 4 Digital Innovation Plan

Title:	**The Buckinghamshire Digital Innovation Plan.**
Purpose:	**To provide Board members with an update on the development of the Buckinghamshire Digital Innovation Plan detailing themes and priorities for the next three years.**
Recommendation(s):	**That members consider and approve the Digital Innovation Plan and comment on any areas of particular interest or concern, particularly in respect of the Action Plan incorporated within the document.**
Impact on Risk Register:	**The plan is part of our digital workplan commitment within the Local Industrial Strategy and will help support our commitment to deliver on digital growth and through training programmes it will help make our business community become more resilient to cyber-crime.**

Background

As part of the commitment within the Local Industrial Strategy Buckinghamshire LEP had planned to produce a holistic digital strategy for Buckinghamshire working closely with the Buckinghamshire Growth Board.

Throughout 2021 the framework for the strategy had been developed and shared with both LEP and Growth Boards. Concerns were raised about the focus of the strategy and the need to prioritise activity linked to the delivery of critical digital infrastructure as part of the proposals established within the Buckinghamshire Growth Deal. As a result, two separate but linked plans are being developed, the first focussing on digital infrastructure provision is being produced by Buckinghamshire Council and the second in relation to digital innovation and the effective use of digital technologies has been produced by BLEP

The National Digital Landscape

Recently there have been significant changes in the way that digital infrastructure is to be delivered across the UK. The current local broadband programmes are coming to an end and will be replaced by a National Gigabit Programme.

The new "Project Gigabit" national programme will be centrally managed by Building Digital UK (BDUK) and the role of local partners will change to much more of an enabling role in supporting and promoting the nationally delivered infrastructure roll out in Buckinghamshire.

Project Gigabit is the government's national mission to deliver lightning-fast, reliable broadband for everyone in the UK. It is the programme title that BDUK uses to describe the approach to the £5bn programme to ensure hard to reach areas don't miss out on lightning-fast next generation broadband. Project Gigabit will largely be driven by three core strands: Project Gigabit Delivery Plan (subsidised market intervention), Hubs and the Gigabit Broadband Voucher Scheme.

Within this programme a total of 142,000 premises are to be connected across Buckinghamshire, Hertfordshire and Berkshire as part of Lot 26. An Open Market Review has been undertaken with procurement commencing from May 2022 and connection commencement from April 2023.

In addition to the core programme two further strands are incorporated into the Project Gigabit scheme including a Community Hubs programme for public buildings and a voucher programme for communities and business clusters to access, there will be a role for both Bucks LEP and BBF to play to ensure that business clusters are aware of these funding opportunities.

Strategic Development

To reflect the national changes and to ensure a focus on digital infrastructure delivery, as highlighted above two separate but complementary plans have been produced. The first maintains a focus on Buckinghamshire Digital Infrastructure Delivery. The second, Buckinghamshire Digital Innovation Plan (presented today), will focus on how the improved infrastructure can be most effectively utilised by our businesses and communities.

Buckinghamshire Digital Infrastructure Delivery
This is to be led by Buckinghamshire Council Economic Regeneration and Growth Team and closely aligned with the local responsibilities for "Project Gigabit" delivery. It will focus on the monitoring, enablement and delivery of improved digital infrastructure through national and local investment and will provide a framework for planning and regulatory services and the use and allocation of discretionary resources such as gainshare funding in which both the Council and LEP have a shared interest.

Buckinghamshire Digital Innovation Plan
This is led by Buckinghamshire LEP and focuses on the effective use of digital resources by businesses and other organisations in Buckinghamshire. The plan highlights how key themes may be utilised in the pursuit of greater digital innovation within Buckinghamshire. For example, how digital skills training and leadership programmes can be effectively supported and how innovation hubs, networks and initiatives can be encouraged through closer collaboration with organisations such as Innovate UK and supported to capitalise on the new infrastructure investment.

Themes of the Digital Innovation Plan

- Strengthening the innovation ecosystem: Central to digital innovation planning is the need to establish diverse partnerships between digital innovation leads in the public, private, voluntary and education sectors.
- Digital Skills: Act on recommendations from the Local Skills Report to ensure current and future workforces are able to thrive in the future economy. We need to ensure we have appropriate talent pipelines for growth sectors, and a strong supply of skills to match future demand.
- Leverage from existing infrastructure programmes: ensure that we maximise the potential for projects such as fibre rollout along the East-West rail route, existing Innovation Hubs and town centre developments.
- Promote Buckinghamshire as an area for testbeds and innovation: champion Buckinghamshire to create new opportunities for inward investment.
- Secure and enable funding: Accelerate investment into the region by working with partners to secure a greater proportion of innovation funding, as well as securing private sector investment.
- Data and Intelligence: utilise our data from the Buckinghamshire Economic Observatory to identify gaps and opportunities for development, as well as using our skills as a partnership body to co-ordinate activities between business partners.

- <u>Improve innovation cluster development and collaboration</u>: drive clusters with the potential to innovation and contribute to knowledge growth, particularly through innovation collaboration and knowledge exchange

Board members are asked to:

i. **Consider and approve the Buckinghamshire Digital Innovation.**
ii. **Comment on the proposed themes and action plan.**