

# **Report to the Cabinet**

**Report reference: C-002-2019/20**

**Date of meeting: 13 June 2019**



**Epping Forest  
District Council**

**Portfolio: Strategic Projects**

**Subject: Endorsement of Essex & Herts Digital Innovation Zone 'Digital Innovation Strategy'**

**Responsible Officer: John Houston (01992 564094) / Mike Warr (01992 564472)**

**Democratic Services: Adrian Hendry (01992 564246).**

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## **Recommendations/Decisions Required:**

**That Cabinet endorse the Essex & Herts Digital Innovation Zone 'Digital Innovation Strategy'.**

## **Executive Summary:**

With Epping Forest DC leading, the Essex & Herts Digital Innovation Zone (DIZ) comprises of five district council areas, (two in eastern Hertfordshire and three in Essex) and involves partners from various public bodies including the health economy, both tiers of local government, further and higher education, business and the voluntary and community sector.

The partnership has jointly commissioned a strategic long-term overarching strategy in conjunction with Arup. The strategy clearly sets out long-term ambitions and an understanding of the area's current and future digital strengths and challenges. It does however also include a series of recommendations for immediate action at an operational level to improve digital performance and service levels.

The strategy is now complete and was considered by Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 16 April 2019. A copy of the strategy was included with papers for that meeting and can be found at <https://rds.eppingforestdc.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=395&MId=9717>. The strategy is now presented to Cabinet for consideration and endorsement.

## **Reasons for Proposed Decision:**

The strategy is to be formally adopted and endorsed by the full range of partners represented on the DIZ Board. This will be the first time in the UK where partners from the various tiers of local government, primary and secondary health care, further and higher education, local businesses and the community and voluntary sector have come together to agree an overarching combined digital plan.

## **Other Options for Action:**

Cabinet could choose to not endorse the strategy. This would make it difficult to formally launch the strategy as a single unified partnership. It would also impact on the ability of the DIZ to bid for funding from central government who have previously recognised the make-up of the DIZ partnership and its unique nature as a key strength and reason to support.

## Report:

1. The Essex & Herts Digital Innovation Zone (DIZ) initiative began in October 2016 with discussions between One Epping Forest, Epping Forest District Council and partners within Essex County Council. Initial investigations looked at the opportunities for public services to use digital to transform service delivery, more efficiently delivering their services and providing a more joined-up service for residents. In addition, partners were looking at how infrastructure investment could help future-proof local economic success and continue to make this location a strong choice for job retention and growth.
2. The DIZ grew quickly from a focus on one district and service sector following discussions with major infrastructure providers and other research. The DIZ now comprises of five district council areas, (two in eastern Hertfordshire and three in Essex) and involves partners from various public bodies including the health economy, both tiers of local government, further and higher education, business and the voluntary and community sector.
3. The DIZ has significantly raised the profile and the understanding of the current and future digital economy in this area and has pioneered a truly multi-agency, multi-area, multi-sector approach to digital innovation and integration. This has only been possible through the ongoing commitment and support of the partners. This inclusive DIZ approach has been recognised by government as a strong and unique selling point for this geography. A cross-border, cross-sector multi-disciplinary partnership, it has successfully worked in a number of areas:
  - Jointly commissioning a strategic long-term overarching strategy to focus work
  - Bidding for external funds on the understanding that collective bidding opens opportunities to access funds that partners would not access individually – LGA / Design Council, DCMS LFFN programme
  - Researching potential applications across various geographies – Open Data Source, Common Assets Register, Town Centre Wi-fi
  - Bringing the widest range of stakeholders and partners together for masterclasses on different aspects of the digital revolution – 5 x Smart Place Seminars (attended by almost 300 delegates)
  - Coordinated and jointly supported the delivery of Superfast Broadband across the geography including enhanced investment
  - Establishing consensus on the importance of digital as a core enabling platform for all the partners in delivery of their services and serving the future needs of residents and businesses.
4. In June 2018 members received a presentation to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the background and progress of the DIZ. This presentation highlighted that a key workstream of the DIZ was the development, in conjunction with Arup, of a Digital Innovation Strategy for the DIZ and members provided advice and guidance at that stage. This strategy is now complete and was considered by Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 16 April 2019. A copy of the strategy was included with papers for that meeting and can be found at <https://rds.eppingforestdc.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=395&MId=9717>. The strategy is now presented to Cabinet for consideration and endorsement.
5. The strategy clearly sets out long-term ambitions and an understanding of the area's current and future digital strengths and challenges. It does however also include a series of recommendations for immediate action at an operational level to improve digital performance. This strategy aims to be adopted and endorsed by the full range of partners represented on the DIZ Board. This will be the first time in the UK where

partners from the various tiers of local government, primary and secondary health care, further and higher education, local businesses and the community and voluntary sector have come together to agree an over-arching combined digital plan.

6. Concurrent with this report to members, partner organisations are also taking the strategy through their own decision-making processes to secure the widest possible sign-up to, and endorsement of, the strategy. At the time of writing scrutiny had already taken place at East Herts DC and Broxbourne BC with the support of Epping Forest DC and the strategy was warmly received and endorsed. Council officers and members will support this process where possible and as requested by partner organisations. Letters of Support have also been received from two of the three DIZ CVS partners. This process of adoption may involve further amendments or additions to achieve our aim of endorsement by all the DIZ partners.
7. Following the adoption of this document by all partners a detailed delivery plan will be drawn up and implemented. This strategy document will also be a key element of any future bids for external funding and form part of the key information to be sent to digital businesses looking to expand or relocate into the area.
8. With the adoption of this strategy the Digital Innovation Zone will be well placed to fully engage with the Government's new industrial strategy and help shape how local partners individually and collectively respond to the digital challenge. It is intended that, once adopted, a high-profile launch event will be delivered to further raise the identity, visibility and positioning of the DIZ and promote the strategy to Government and key industry stakeholders.
9. This strategy has been compiled with the ongoing support of a wide range of organisations following interviews with representatives from all sectors and a major conference to refine its objectives and content. While this strategy, and its delivery plan, will need to evolve over time it puts the Digital Innovation Zone well ahead of other areas that are not Smart Cities in preparing to meet the digital challenge 'better together'.

#### **Resource Implications:**

Whilst the report does not have any immediate resource implications there will be a need, in the future, to consider the resources required to both deliver the programme and fund specific initiatives. Work is ongoing with DIZ partners to understand the best model to achieve this and ensure the greatest efficiency from publicly funded digital investment programmes.

The DIZ Board is currently in discussions with public and private sector partners on plans to establish a DIZ Office to lead on delivery of the strategy and to coordinate and deliver bids for external funding. A target of £200,000 per annum has been set for three years. Epping Forest is being asked to earmark £10,000 per annum from existing budgets as the District's contribution.

#### **Legal and Governance Implications:**

None

#### **Safer, Cleaner and Greener Implications:**

None

#### **Consultation Undertaken:**

This strategy has been compiled with the ongoing support of a wide range of organisations, following interviews with representatives from all sectors and a major conference to refine its objectives and content.

**Background Papers:**

There is a set of data appendices to the strategy document which are available, currently in their original raw format, should members request

**Risk Management:**

None