

Economy, Business Growth & Skills Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date: 12 March 2021

Subject: Greater Manchester Digital Blueprint: One Year On

Report of: Cllr Sean Fielding, Portfolio Lead Leader for Digital City Region; Sara Todd Portfolio Lead Chief Executive for Digital City Region

PURPOSE OF REPORT:

The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of GM Digital delivery and achievements 2020/21 and an outline of activity planned for 2021/22.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Economy, Business Growth & Skills Overview and Scrutiny Committee is requested to:

- Review progress against the GM Digital Blueprint's ambitions during 2020/21 and consider the key activities planned for 2021/22.
- Support the direction of travel and prioritization of GM Digital activity.

CONTACT OFFICERS: Phil Swan, GM Digital Chief Information Officer; Lisa Rice, GM Digital Portfolio Management Office Lead, GMCA

Equalities Implications:

Regular portfolio level reviews and corresponding Equality Impact Assessments of the GM Digital Portfolio are undertaken. These reviews highlight where there may be a detrimental impact on individuals with protected characteristic, where there may be additional need to target activity to advance equality of opportunity and what activity should be undertaken to foster good relations between people who share protected characteristics and those who don't. The outputs of the review and Equality Impact Assessment are shared with the GM Digital Portfolio Delivery Executive members and the GM Digital Steering Group.

Climate Change Impact Assessment and Mitigation Measures –

Across the GM Digital Portfolio there are activities intended to reduce Greater Manchester's carbon footprint. This includes work by TFGM on traffic signally optimisation

BOLTON
BURY

MANCHESTER
OLDHAM

ROCHDALE
SALFORD

STOCKPORT
TAMESIDE

TRAFFORD
WIGAN

to reduce waiting times, re-using existing ducting to roll out 2,700km of new fibre connectivity rather than new dig, and exploring ways of using data to encourage individuals to reduce their carbon footprints.

The programme includes work with global organisations on their plans to reduce their emissions from data centres.

Remote / home working has been a strong feature of the pandemic response, enabled by digital capabilities. As Greater Manchester and the country looks to “reset” its working practices as lockdowns ease, encouraging practices that enable more local working, use of public transport and reduced car travel present a significant opportunity for the city region.

Risk Management:

Risks to delivery are closely managed via project and programme board relating to individual initiatives.

External advisory boards assist with the identification of risks.

The GM Digital Portfolio Executive and Steering Group monitor respond to escalated risks.

Legal Considerations:

n/a

Financial Consequences – Revenue:

n/a

Financial Consequences – Capital:

n/a

Number of attachments to the report: 0

BACKGROUND PAPERS:

GM Digital Blueprint available at the following link: <https://www.greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/what-we-do/digital/>

Related Scrutiny Report, November 2019, available at the following link:

<https://democracy.greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/documents/s3268/Digital%20Strategy.pdf>

1 INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The first GM Digital Strategy was published in February 2018. It built on the ambition outlined in the Greater Manchester Strategy that GM will be a world-leading digital city-region, to set out our vision for GM as a digital city-region with a difference.
- 1.2 This work was updated last year, placing the city-region's people more firmly at the heart of plans with a refreshed GM Digital Blueprint that was launched in February 2020 setting out a three-year approach for Greater Manchester to be a world leading digital city-region. It aligns with the GM Strategy and the GM Local Industrial Strategy.
- 1.3 The Blueprint set out five priorities and two enablers as the focus of activity and influence:
 - **Empowering people:** We want to make sure that everyone in Greater Manchester, whatever their age, location or situation, can benefit from the opportunities digital can bring
 - **Enabling innovative public services:** We want to apply exemplar digital ideas and practice to delivering public services in Greater Manchester, linking innovative business, academic and public sector thinking with the needs of Greater Manchester's people.
 - **Digitally enabling all businesses:** Businesses of all sizes should have the means and skills to digitise their business and make the most of the opportunities that brings.
 - **Creating and scaling digital businesses:** We're encouraging and supporting businesses to start, grow or move to Greater Manchester, recognising the importance of the continued expansion of our digital, creative and tech sector and the opportunities this brings for our people.
 - **Being a global influencer:** Greater Manchester is taking its position as an internationally recognised centre of digital innovation, research and practice.

Enablers:

- **Strengthening our digital talent pipeline:** Our vision is to create a critical mass of digital talent, positioning Greater Manchester as the key place for businesses seeking a digitally-skilled workforce to invest in outside of London.
 - **Extending our world class digital infrastructure:** We will ensure that Greater Manchester has the digital infrastructure it needs to be a world class digital city region.
- 1.4 It is important to note that the GM Digital Blueprint is a strategy for the city-region, not only the GMCA, and activity spans a broad range of organizations and communities in the GM Digital eco-system including local authorities, health services, Greater Manchester Combined Authority, Transport for Greater Manchester, MIDAS, businesses, universities and the Voluntary Social Enterprise and Community Sector..

2 GM DIGITAL PANDEMIC RESPONSE

- 2.1 The digital response to Covid-19 has helped the city-region to manage the challenges of the pandemic, support the most vulnerable, address inequality and secure positive prospects for Greater Manchester.

- 2.2 Greater Manchester has a thriving digital and technology eco-system, world-leading technical infrastructure and capabilities and is renowned for supreme partnership and cross-sector collaboration. Greater Manchester was therefore in a position of strength, able to immediately draw on these existing assets and capabilities to mitigate the devastation of Covid-19 on public services, citizens and the Greater Manchester economy.
- 2.3 Key activities in relation to the pandemic have included:
- The acceleration of development and use of the GM Care Record, which holds GP data and makes it available to hospitals. This now covers over 99.7% of patients in Greater Manchester, up from 71% pre-pandemic.
 - A “situation reporting” system that provided the means of capturing and reporting on pandemic related data – PPE availability, sickness absence etc - from over 2,700 settings multiple times per week.
 - Local track & trace hub facilities and humanitarian response systems development to enable effective coordination.
 - Digital inclusion activities described further below.
- 2.4 An impressive level of GM Digital activity was delivered by a plethora of partners from the public sector, the private sector and the VCSE sector in 2020/21 with marked success, setting the standards for best practice which can be drawn on in the future both regionally and nationally. Rapid identification of priorities and decisive action on where to optimise resource enabled critical immediate response activities and the establishment of strategic action to underpin effective delivery on the GM Digital priorities and strengthen the future of GM.

3 PROGRESS IN 2020/21

- 3.1 The headline measures of success for the GM Digital Blueprint were to have achieved the following by 2023:
- An increase in digital inclusion and basic digital skills across the city region to 80%.
 - Average download speeds in GM will exceed 100MPS.
 - Employment and skills in digital and creative industries will rise to 96,000.

And

- The Creative, digital & Tech economy in GM will have grown to £5.5BN from £5BN by 2025
- 3.2 Evidence is not currently available to assess progress against these measures, however focussed activity and the pandemic has brought all of these into stark attention. The following are indicative of significant progress:
- Home schooling and the shift to online GP consultations supported by both governmental and locally driven distribution of technology has enabled more people to get online than ever. Whilst work with the Good Things Foundation has highlighted that as many as 1.2M people in Greater Manchester are digitally excluded in some way, it is estimated that 80,000 PCs or other devices have been distributed to school children in Greater Manchester so far and more to care homes and vulnerable. The GM Tech Fund and 100% Digital Inclusion ambition launched at Autumn’s “Digitober” events by Cllr Sean Fielding and Andy

Burnham have set the bar higher on this ambition which is being responded to by the GM Digital Inclusion Taskforce and the Young People's Taskforce with significant industry support.

- Average download speeds across the UK rose to 71MBS in May 2020, however this includes all rural areas. Gigabit connectivity availability in Greater Manchester is expected to reach over 65% properties by the end of 2021. Over 2,700km of fibre connecting approx.1,600 public sites is being delivered by the end of 2021 through several contracts, most notably the GM Local Full Fibre Programme placing Greater Manchester at the forefront of connected city regions.
- The pandemic has had a mixed impact on employment in the digital sector with both opportunities and pressures. However it is clear that the digital sector remains one of the main recruiters in Greater Manchester with significant growth of incumbents and new entrants to the market seeking access to our diverse pool of experienced individuals and students without paying a London premium.
- Greater Manchester overtook Cambridge as the area with the second highest venture capital investment in the UK in 2020 reaching \$687.6m in 2019, up from \$199.1m in 2018¹. In addition, in one week in February 2021, four Greater Manchester companies raised over £153M collectively, and in September 2020 The Hut Group enjoyed the largest market floatation since Royal Mail in 2013. Six of the UK's 14 digital unicorns (start-ups valued at over \$1bn) are now based in the North West, which represents 15% of the entire European total² and reflects the increasing interest in being based here.

3.3 Across all the Priorities covered in the Digital Blueprint there has been a high level of intense activity in 2020-21. With digital being a key area of focus in terms of the economic response to the pandemic, this impetus to ensure the city-region and its communities are well positioned to take advantage of digital opportunities will continue alongside accelerating work on digital innovation and transformation of public services.

4 GM DIGITAL IN 2021/22

- 4.1 The plans for delivery on the GM Digital Priorities over the next 6-12 months reflect the targeted response to the economic challenges that businesses face, the need to build inclusivity into every project and the ambition to use data and digital to create opportunity. As a city region, Greater Manchester remains committed to creating opportunity for people of all ages in Greater Manchester to live well, access learning, skills and careers, enjoy successful businesses and benefit from good environments and high-quality public services.
- 4.2 Specific activities planned in 21/22 flow from investment and activity already underway, however key areas of activity include:
- Growing the influence and impact of the Digital Inclusion Taskforce to address digital exclusion at scale through local activity and Government influence.

¹ [Manchester named UK's second most attractive city for tech investment - Invest in Manchester](#)

² [North-West England 'perfect' growth area for tech startups \(computerweekly.com\)](#)

- Improving School Readiness by developing and supporting localities to adopt Greater Manchester's ground-breaking Early Years digital solutions for health visiting and early education for 0-5 year olds.
- Scaling adoption of technologies that enable people to work and travel more effectively, reduce carbon footprints and be healthy, safe and well at home.
- Building on findings of the Local Data Review so that the city region can release more data of value to our economy and communities.
- Working with a refreshed GM Digital Strategic Advisors Group, chaired by Cllr Sean Fielding, and the Local Economic Partnership to develop and champion a Digital Cluster Development Strategy in line with the Local Industrial Strategy and aligned with Innovation GM, focusing on key and unique strengths of Greater Manchester.
- Enhancing fixed and wireless (4G and 5G) connectivity through industry collaboration and successfully delivering the Local Full Fibre Network and working together across public services to leverage these assets to drive better public services and innovation.
- Building on the Industry Labour Market Intelligence for Digital & Tech findings led by the GMCA Skills & Work team to better align the skills system with employer needs.

4.3 The development of refreshed plans are being overseen by the GM Digital Steering Group, chaired by Cllr Sean Fielding, and the GM Digital Delivery Executive, chaired by Sara Todd with input from stakeholders across Greater Manchester.

5 CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

5.1 GM Digital is a significant programme for Greater Manchester with the sector being a priority growth area and with digital innovation underpinning future delivery of effective and resilient public services. Support is sought for continued prioritisation of activity in this area.