Report to:	Place, Regeneration and Housing Committee		
Date:	31st August 2023		
Subject:	**West Yorkshire Digital Infrastructure Programme**		
Director:	Liz Hunter, Director Policing, Environment and Place		
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Is this a key decision?	☐ Yes	☒ No
Is the decision eligible for call-in by Scrutiny?	☐ Yes	☒ No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information or appendices?	☐ Yes	☒ No
If relevant, state paragraph number of Schedule 12A, Local Government Act 1972, Part 1:		
Are there implications for equality and diversity?	☐ Yes	☒ No

1. Purpose of this report

1.1 To provide the Place, Regeneration and Housing Committee Members with an overview of West Yorkshire digital and broadband infrastructure landscape and delivery programmes.

1.2 To engage and seek views from Place, Regeneration and Housing Committee Members on the emerging digital infrastructure programme business case.

2. Information

Context

Strategic and Policy Context

2.1 In 2019, a Digital Framework for the Leeds City Region was issued – made up of 5 outcomes – for activity and investment and to provide a collective narrative/ambition for 'digital' in the city region. One of the 5 outcomes of the framework was *'world class digital infrastructure.'* This included investing in world class connectivity through fibre, mobile, wireless, and new technologies.

2.2 In April 2021, the Local Enterprise Partnership's (LEP) geographic remit altered to encompass the whole of West Yorkshire. Alongside this, there has been increased digital adaptation by residents and businesses during COVID,

new trading relations with the European Union, and significant advances in technology. It is therefore timely to refresh this framework.

2.3 A refreshed framework will be known as a West Yorkshire Digital Blueprint. This will provide an update on how lives are transformed by digital technologies and will include a coherent strategy for delivery and partnership working, framed into three strands: place, people, and businesses. Of particular importance for this committee is *'Place'* - ensuring the region is a well-connected place providing the latest digital infrastructure networks such as 5G mobile connectivity and gigabit capable broadband.

2.4 The Mayor has pledged to *'support local businesses and be a champion for our regional economy.'* Digital Infrastructure is a key component of this pledge, not only increasing the number of premises connected to gigabit capable broadband but taking advantage of opportunities from Internet of Things (IoT) technologies and the connected places (or 'Smart Cities'). Digital Infrastructure underpins many other of the mayor's priorities and has a place in tackling the Climate Emergency.

2.5 Delivering fast and reliable broadband is vital to the economic performance of West Yorkshire and supports the Combined Authority's strategic objective of delivering inclusive growth by removing barriers to education, training, and employment opportunities. Digital Infrastructure can also enhance transport experience and support our aspirations for modal shift by allowing for seamless, connected journeys on public transport. Wireless and mobile networks will allow for passengers to work enroute and ensure they can connect to onwards journeys with ease. With the push for more people to use public transport, and more people able to connect to gigabit-capable infrastructure, this in turn can result in fewer car journeys, leading to better air quality.

Coverage and Take Up
2.6 84.73% of West Yorkshire premises have access to gigabit-capable broadband infrastructure, which is just above the national average. Poor coverage is often found in rural areas, there are still many pockets of poor coverage in urban areas.

2.7 The Government is aiming for 85% of the population to have gigabit broadband by 2025, and for at least 99% by 2030. This will only be possible through public investment to address areas of market failure e.g., by Project Gigabit at the national level. Currently known commercial and public sector investment is likely to get the nation to c.85-90% gigabit coverage. There is a role for the public sector (particularly at the regional level) in unlocking gigabit coverage for the 'final 5-10%' and accelerating commercial investment to secure the benefits sooner.

Emerging Digital Infrastructure Proposals
2.8 The Committee (7 July 2022) received an update on proposals for development work on a new digital infrastructure programme utilising

Broadband Gainshare. The ongoing work was endorsed, with a view to returning to the Committee at a later date.

2.9 A presentation accompanies this item (see Appendix 1). The presentation provides an update on the digital infrastructure programme development work. The slides provide an overview of:

- Policy Context: outline of the overarching policy content for the Leeds City Region Digital Framework 2019 and emerging Digital Blueprint.

- Outline of Previous and Current Digital Infrastructure Delivery Programmes: including Superfast West Yorkshire and York Broadband Programme and Project Gigabit.

- Digital Inclusion and Broadband Take Up: an outline of the wider digital landscape and the work of WYCA, including digital inclusion and broadband take up.

- Bridging the Gap: outlining the remaining digital infrastructure challenge, the role of the public sector and why it's important for us to step in.

- Emerging Future Digital Programmes and Funding: summary of headline options considered, key areas of programme development and funding opportunities.

- 5G Innovation Regions – Department for Science, Innovation and Technology Fund: a brief overview of the fund and summary of the local approach to this opportunity.

- Next Steps: overview of timelines for programme development and Project Gigabit.

- Discussion Points: the views of the Committee are invited on the emerging framework for the programme. Including: Emerging Approach; Scale and Phasing; Residential vs. Business Users; Scheme Development; Other Considerations.

3. Tackling the Climate Emergency Implications

3.1 Climate change is being driven by carbon emissions caused by human activity. Delivery of digital infrastructure offers cross cutting benefits and opportunities that support the move towards net zero.

3.2 The programmes outlined in this paper provide enhanced opportunities for businesses to innovate and boost their productivity and for residents to work more flexibly, reducing the need to travel and cutting the amount of car journeys being made, leading to improvements in air quality. Digital technology also supports smart technologies including deployment of smart meters, smart energy grids and other opportunities to use energy more efficiently.

3.3 Migrating communications infrastructure from older copper technology to more resilient and energy efficient fibre optic services will significantly reduce the energy demands for delivering telecoms services.

4. Inclusive Growth Implications

4.1 Many of the communities targeted by public sector digital programmes are in areas of market failure which are unlikely to receive enhanced connectivity via commercial means.

4.2 Areas of poor coverage are likely to find it more difficult to make best use of digital services which may increase social exclusion. There areas are predominantly rural but there are also small pockets of poor coverage in urban locations.

5. Equality and Diversity Implications

5.1 Many of the proposed digital programmes will have a focus on rural and/or hard to reach areas which are experiencing market failure. This has a positive EDI impact as these communities are currently experiencing an element of digital exclusion.

5.2 Any new project proposals will be subject to an Equality Impact Assessment as part of the project's development.

6. Financial Implications

6.1 No funding commitments or decisions are sought at this stage. As the programme is developed detailed financial work will be completed. It is envisaged that Broadband Gainshare funding may be suitable for the proposed programmes. Consideration also needs to be given to how other funding sources could support, enhance or accelerate the proposals.

7. Legal Implications

7.1 There are no legal implications directly arising from this report.

8. Staffing Implications

8.1 Work is currently ongoing to determine delivery options for this emerging work programme. This includes consideration of delivery by the Combined Authority (which would require new delivery staff), deliver in partnership with local authority partners and procuring external resources.

9. External Consultees

9.1 The proposals outlined in this update have been developed using a partnership approach. This includes engaging with industry, central government and the wider public sector.

10.   Recommendations

10.1   That Committee Members are asked to:

1.   Consider the programme of work highlighted in the paper above and agree for work to continue in the development of a digital infrastructure programme business case.

11.   Background Documents

There are no background documents referenced in this report.

12.   Appendices

Appendix 1 – West Yorkshire Digital Infrastructure Programme (Slide Deck)