Belfast City Council

Subject:	Update on Smart Belfast and Belfast Digital Innovation Partnership
Date:	23rd October 2020
Reporting Officer:	Ronan Cregan, Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Finance and Resources Jayne Brady, Digital Commissioner
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Restricted Reports			
Is this report restricted?	**Yes**		**No** X
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?			
After Committee Decision			
After Council Decision			
Sometime in the future			
Never			

Call-in			
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	**Yes** X	**No**	

1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues
1.1	This paper presents a short impact report on the Smart Belfast work and the development of the Belfast Digital Innovation Partnership.

2.0	**Recommendations**
2.1	The Committee is asked to:
	1. note the attached Smart Belfast Outcomes and Impact report;
	2. agree that Belfast City Council contribute £50,000 to the Belfast Digital Innovation Partnership's £300,000 co-investment budget;
	3. agree a £20,000 contribution to the £650,000 EIT Digital project tracking the impact of public funding across the Belfast Fintech sector; and
	4. note the development of the Digital Futures programme.
3.0	**Main Report**
3.1	**Smart Belfast Outcomes and Impact report**
	Attached is an impact report summarising the projects and initiatives supported by the Smart Belfast programme during its first three years of operation. Smart Belfast was set up by the Council in 2017 with the aim of harnessing digital innovation to solve major city challenges while also helping to grow a twenty-first century economy. Its challenge-led approach brings together businesses, our universities, government and citizens to co-create innovative solutions that improve city life.
3.2	Some of the key outputs from Smart Belfast include:
	• Leveraged £10.2 million into the city
	• Successfully delivered 47 digital projects
	• Worked directly with over 200 SMEs and stakeholders
	• Hosted over 30 events with 4,100 participants
	• Built Northern Ireland's first free-to-use Internet of things network
	• Successfully bid for two Horizon 2020 projects with a combined value of €1.2 million
	• Won $1 million to establish the Belfast Office for Resilience
	• Led on the development of the £120 million digital bid to City Deal
	• Supported four Collaborative Growth networks involving 16 Belfast SMEs
	• Showcased the best of Belfast at international tech events in Barcelona, USA and China.
3.3	**Tracking the Impact of public support for the fintech sector**
	Belfast's fintech sector has been one of the major success stories over the past decade, and a major source of well-paid, high skilled jobs. It is also a sector that has proven surprisingly resilient during the current Covid crisis, with a number of companies expanding their work force. The Fintech sector is likely to be a focus of support as Belfast ramps up its Digital Innovation ambition.

3.4	To support this approach Smart Belfast is seeking to partner in a £650,000 project funded by EIT Digital to track the impact of public funds in the sector. Local SME Xpand are working with local industry, Belgian SME accelerator 'Start-It' KBC[1] and the city of Antwerp to develop a set of software tools to help connect businesses to finance, to develop KPIs to measure how SMEs are impacted by funding, and to create more efficient, lightweight mechanisms for public officials to track grant spend. The project is also seeking to utilise open banking technologies to reduce the bureaucracy associated with many economic development funds.
3.5	If Belfast commits £20,000 to the project, the Council and its partners get access to the expert learning and software tools being developed by the project. And this would then be used to deliver a three-month project involving the local Fintech sector. It would also represent the first building block for wider engagement across other sectors of the city's digital economy.
3.6	Members are asked to approve a £20,000 contribution to the EIT Digital project in tracking the impact of public funds (and thus receiving the benefits of the larger £650,000 project).
3.7	**Belfast Digital Innovation partnership** Learning from the success of Smart Belfast the Council and its city partners are now developing even more ambitious plans focused on the potential of digital innovation to build an economy capable of competing in the twenty-first century.
3.8	A new Belfast Digital Innovation Partnership (BDIP), which includes the Council, Queen's University, Ulster University, Belfast Harbour, Invest NI, and Catalyst Inc, has developed a shared ambition which aims to accelerate sustainable and inclusive growth through innovation.
3.9	Working with the leadership team from Eindhoven, one of Europe's most successful innovative cities, BDIP partners have drafted an initial project portfolio that aims to attract international investment, support local cluster growth, support a digital skills agenda; contribute to the sustainable development of our city, and work with communities to ensure economic inclusion.

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[1] https://startit.be

3.10	The initial focus, in this post Covid period, will be to engage with innovation companies and policy-makers, on our plans for the coming ten years, ensuring Belfast is recognised globally as the place to invest in digital innovation during recovery. Promotional concepts for the Belfast Smart District were shared with Members at the June 2020 committee meeting.
3.11	Prior to a planned public launch in November 2020, the BDIP partners agreed to co-invest £50k to support an operational budget that will begin to deliver on its ambitious pipeline of projects which include: **Innovation District** which covers a 400 acre geographical area of the city from the city centre around the new Ulster University campus up to Catalyst in Queen's Island, will foster a place-based approach to cluster growth in fintech, healthtech and Greentech – while at the same time delivering an inclusive urban regeneration agenda. **Smart healthy neighbourhood** - to develop an internationally significant digital health demonstrator in the heart of the city. Co-designed and developed with housing providers, residents, and health stakeholders, and based in the Inner North West area of city centre, this neighbourhood will provide a supportive environment for technologists, researchers, and will seek to attract inward investment from the life and health sciences sector. Elements will include pervasive wireless connectivity (funded via the Belfast City Deal Infrastructure Enabling Fund) and a citizen-focused engagement programme. **Integrated sustainable mobility** - this project will seek to address the inter-connected issues of connectivity to Queen's island (and the associated growth constraints), the connectivity challenges in a post-Covid city centre, the over-dependence on the private car across the smart district travel to work area, and the need to support active travel as part of the city's health agenda. Such a project will also provide opportunities to enhance research programmes across both universities (including CARL and GII) and support innovative business development opportunities. **Smart Port** -Through significant investments in 5G connectivity and open architecture data, the Smart Port will deploy a number of IoT, mobility and Community Platform solutions to unlock new levels of safety, sustainability, and efficiency within Belfast Harbour and throughout Northern Ireland's sea freight logistics chain. Such digital solutions will assist Belfast Harbour to achieve its aims of becoming the world's smartest and greenest regional port and a key economic hub for growth.
3.12	Members are asked to agree that Belfast City Council, as a key partner, will contribute £50,000 to drive forward this ambitious programme.

3.13	**Digital Futures Programme** Digital Futures has been developed by Belfast Region City Deal partners, working closely with government and industry to deliver a rapid response to the economic impact of the pandemic. Funded by the Department for the Economy as part of the Skills Intervention Programme, and delivered by a number of FE Colleges across the region, Digital Futures will support 55 graduates over the next six months, giving them opportunities to explore career pathways in Cloud Computing, Data Analytics and Cyber Security. There is a very tight timeframe for delivery of the programme as the funding has just been awarded this month and all delivery must be completed by the end of March 2021, due to DfE funding timescales. Due to the tight timeframe courses will commence late October/early November and training will be delivered online. Note that the closing date was **Monday 19th October.** Each participant will get access to a training allowance of £150 per week throughout the entire duration of the programmes. The internship element of the programme will commence in the New Year and BRCD partners are actively recruiting employers to host internships. **<u>Digital Futures Programmes</u>** - **Cyber Security:** https://www.swc.ac.uk/digitalfutures - **Data Analytics:** https://app.mindmill.co.uk/MyMindMill/landing/serc - **Cloud Computing:** https://www.belfastmet.ac.uk/support-for-business/digital-futures/
	Financial and Resource Implications
3.14	All costs associated with this work and recommendations have been identified within existing budgets.
	Equality or Good Relations Implications / Rural Needs Assessment
3.15	None.
4.0	**Documents Attached**
	Impact and Outcomes Impact Report