



Subject:	Supporting Belfast's Digital Innovation Ambition
Date:	20th August, 2021
Reporting Officer:	Ronan Cregan, Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Finance and Resources
Contact Officer:	Mark Gillan, Digital Innovation Commissioner Deborah Colville, City Innovation Manager Mark McCann, City Innovation programme lead

Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sometime in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

Call-in	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

1.0	Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues
1.1	To outline proposals for a Belfast Digital Innovation framework that seeks to unlock the power of digital innovation to support the city in its post-Covid recovery and longer-term plans. The framework will seek to maximise the combined impact of a series of planned initiatives and investments on the social, economic and environmental challenges facing the city over the next decade. Members are asked to approve the approach and agree to a number of temporary roles to support the work.

2.0	Recommendations
2.1	<p>The Members of the Committee are asked to recommend that, in accordance with the Council decision of 4th May, the Chief Executive exercise her delegated authority to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. note the works strands on digital innovation in the city; 2. approve the recruitment of four temporary roles (three years) to support the further development of this work (an Advanced Wireless Infrastructure – Innovation Broker, Smart District Innovation Broker and two Innovation Challenge Fund managers); 3. note the rationale for a Belfast digital innovation framework and agree that proposals will be brought to the September Committee meeting; and 4. note that Mr. Mark Gillan has been appointed (via SIB) as the Interim Belfast Digital Innovation Commissioner to replace Jayne Brady who will take up her new role as Head of the Civil Service on 1st September.
3.0	Main Report
3.1	Over the past four years, the Council has been working with key institutions to develop a shared understanding of the importance of digital innovation to the future of the city and, more recently, seeking to build a common city level approach to maximise the opportunity that digital innovation represents in the post-Covid world.
3.2	This work began in 2017 with the Council's Smart Belfast programme developed in partnership with one of the UK Government's Catapults and local partners. Smart Belfast, which is managed by the Council's City Innovation team, has delivered a range of successful projects with industry, SMEs and our universities. Its core approach has been to clearly define shared urban 'challenges' and then create opportunities for business, academia and the public sector to collaborate and co-invest in developing innovative digital solutions, while at the same time generating opportunities for our local SMEs to develop ideas for new products and services. Over its life span Smart Belfast has delivered a diverse range of projects and attracted significant investments for the city and has been showcased at both a national and international level.
3.3	Earlier this year, the establishment of a new strategic partnership, Innovation City Belfast (ICB) , which brings together the senior teams at Queen's University, Ulster University, Belfast Harbour, Invest NI and Catalyst, (has significantly increased the City's ambition in utilising digital innovation to transform our economy and tackle major societal challenges). The

	partnership is supported by the Digital Innovation Commissioner and a number of other jointly funded staff, along with the Council's City Innovation team.
3.4	ICB is committed to nurturing an urban environment in which industry, academia and the public sector can collaborate on urban challenges such as climate change, technological disruption and the health of our communities. The Covid-19 crisis has not only amplified these challenges and opportunities but has greatly accelerated the time scales against which they need to be addressed.
3.5	<p>The Partnership has agreed to prioritise three interconnected place-based projects that will have a significant impact on our city and its economy across three geographical areas:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Innovation District - a 400 acre area along Queen's Island and reaching over to the Ulster University Campus. This location act as a 'digital innovation economy multiplier' - an inclusive, mixed-use urban environment for research, innovation, entrepreneurialism and investment. ICB has recently appointed an Innovation District Programme Director (Clare Guinness) to take forward the phase 1 development of this district. 2. The Smart Port - With substantial investments in infrastructure and digital technologies, Belfast Harbour aims to become a Smart Port and Green Port, setting Belfast on the global stage with one of the world's best regional ports. 3. The Smart District – Mapping closely to the boundaries of the city centre, the Smart District will be the location where new digital and data technologies can be tested, trialled, scaled and deployed in a real urban setting. The concept is to encourage partners to work together to remove unnecessary barriers and bureaucracies, to create the supporting conditions in which communities, researchers, SMEs, innovators and public sector bodies can co-develop world-first novel solutions to real-world challenges. The Smart District's emphasis will be on bringing world-class innovation to bear on the critical priorities for our city, particularly those articulated in the city's Bolder Vision for the city centre and in our Climate Plan.
3.6	Within these districts, challenge-owners will have access to world-class connectivity, physical assets, data platforms, challenge funding, collaborative partnerships, and operate in a supportive sandbox environment in which new ideas can be explored. To further stimulate

	<p>innovation, we will develop a challenge programme that will incentivise local businesses and academia to collaborate with us on societal challenges to help transform the local economy. As the Districts grow they will become the showcase for the city's innovation ambition and become attractors for co-investment and funding.</p>
3.7	<p>To take forward the key elements of the work described above four three-year contracts are required:</p> <p>Smart District Innovation Broker – This role will provide a programme approach to the development of the various strands of work within the smart district. This includes aligned of the co-creation and co design of the Smart Healthy Neighbourhood, Smart Mobility and Smart Energy projects as well as developing co-investment opportunities and leading bids to government funding schemes. The broker will also work to maximise the impact of Belfast Region City Deal digital and innovation investments on the city.</p> <p>Advanced Wireless Infrastructure - Project Broker. This role will focus deployment of advanced wireless networks across the Districts and lead the development of a £30 million business case for submission to the Belfast Region City Deal Infrastructure Enabling Fund. The post holder will work with the mobile industry, city asset owners, and end-users to take forward the business case, and to establish a delivery vehicle to ensure that Belfast has world-class connectivity early in this decade.</p> <p>Challenge Funds Managers (x2) – These roles will lead the development of challenges programmes and the business cases for drawdown from the £50 million Belfast Region City Deal. They will develop models for managing funds; lead the business case development; take recommendations and business cases through Council and the City Deal governance processes; and if successful in obtaining funds, initiate programmes to support delivery of the programmes.</p> <p>Connected Places Catapult's Homes for Health Ageing</p>
3.8	<p>An early example of the 'attractor' role that the smart district is playing, even in its early stages, is Belfast's recent success in bidding to the Connected Places Catapult's Homes for Health Ageing programme. This £2.5 million programme will support a small number of innovative 'testbeds' that seek understand how scientists, engineers, and public policy leads can work more effectively with communities to develop technologies in the real-world setting of homes</p>

	and neighbourhoods. In choosing our region, the Catapult was impressed with city's wider digital ambition and our long term plans for the smart district in particular.
3.9	<p>A Northern Ireland consortium made up of Age NI, Belfast City Council, Connected Health Innovation Centre (CHIC), Market Development Association (MDA), Public Health Agency NI, Queen's University Belfast, The Health Innovation Research Alliance (HIRANI) and Ulster University is one of two UK partners selected for the programme, and has secured £50,000 for an initial scoping phase. Over the next two years, the NI consortium will explore and testbed innovative technologies to support people live longer in their homes and enjoy healthy, active lives as they age.</p> <p>Towards a new Belfast Digital Innovation ambition</p>
3.10	As Members will note, the development of the Smart Belfast framework, the digital ambition of the Innovation City Belfast and the investments opportunities available within the Belfast Region City Deal, all took place in a pre-Covid policy environment. In the subsequent 16 months, the wider strategic environment has changed dramatically. The Covid crisis has both accelerated and highlighted a wide range of economic and urban policy issues facing the city. These range from the impact on the city's already underperforming economy, its impact on the future nature of the high street, through to Covid's implications for our approach to higher density urban living and travel modes.
3.11	Alongside this, a number of major policy pieces have been produced that have brought greater clarity to the city' challenges – including the Resilience Strategy, the Belfast climate plan, and the draft Bolder Vision for the city centre. And, at a regional and national level, the new 10X vision for the economy and the UK Innovation strategy, both have implications for our approach to digital innovation.
3.12	The new Digital Innovation Framework for Belfast will bring together the cities ambition and priorities for digital innovation and re-frame the Council's and the city's approach in the light of these new partnership initiatives and policy priorities. In particular, the revised framework would seek to ensure that the city maximises the positive impact of the planned Digital investments under City Deal to ensure they reflect the new priorities for the city.
3.13	Members are asked to note that this framework will be co-designed with Members and stakeholders over the coming four months – with initial proposals presented at the September Committee meeting.

	Financial and Resource Implications
3.14	<p>Funding for the three (three-year) roles has already been identified within existing budgets, as follows:</p> <p>Smart District Innovation Broker – Smart Cities Budget</p> <p>Advanced Wireless Post – the Council's BRCD budget</p> <p>Challenge Fund Managers (x2) – the Council's BRCD budget</p>
	Equality or Good Relations Implications / Rural Needs Assessment
3.15	None.
4.0	Documents Attached
	None.