

<b>Title of Report:</b>	<b>Digital Projects Update</b>
<b>Committee Report Submitted To:</b>	<b>The Leisure &amp; Development Committee</b>
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	<b>19<sup>th</sup> January 2021</b>
<b>For Decision or For Information</b>	<b>For Information</b>

<b>Linkage to Council Strategy (2019-23)</b>	
<b>Strategic Theme</b>	Innovation & Transformation Accelerating our Economy and Contributing to Prosperity
<b>Outcome</b>	The Council will embrace new technologies and processes where they can bring about better experiences for citizens and visitors.  Promoting the Borough as an attractive place to live, work, invest and visit.
<b>Lead Officer</b>	Strategic Projects Manager

<b>Budgetary Considerations</b>	
Cost of Proposal	N/A
Included in Current Year Estimates	N/A
Capital/Revenue	N/A
Code	N/A
Staffing Costs	N/A

<b>Screening Requirements</b>	Required for new or revised Policies, Plans, Strategies or Service Delivery Proposals.		
Section 75 Screening	Screening Completed:	No	Date:
	EQIA Required and Completed:	No	Date:
Rural Needs Assessment (RNA)	Screening Completed	No	Date:
	RNA Required and Completed:	No	Date:
Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA)	Screening Completed:	No	Date:
	DPIA Required and Completed:	No	Date:

## 1.0 Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to provide an update to Elected Members in relation to key digital projects currently being 'rolled-out' across the Borough.

## 2.0 Background

In a rapidly evolving digital landscape e.g., superfast broadband; 4G/5G, etc. it is critical that CC&G develops and evolves its current digital infrastructure to ensure it meets the needs of the Borough.

Although existing digital infrastructure in the Borough is relatively weak compared to other areas of the UK, key strategic developments are starting to deliver significant change. **The Full Fibre Northern Ireland (FFNI) and Project Stratum** have just started deployment within our Borough and will hopefully turn our area from one of the poorest connected areas in the UK, to one of the best connected in Europe.

Ensuring that people and businesses in Causeway Coast and Glens adapt to this change and make the most of the opportunity available to them is the critical challenge of both Causeway's new **Digital Strategy and Growth Deal**.

## 3.0 Project Updates

A summary update in relation to each of these key digital strategic projects are set out below.

### 3.1 Project Stratum Update

Project Stratum represents an investment of £150m by the Department for the Economy (DfE) and £15m by the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA). The £165m broadband improvement contract has been awarded to Fibrus Networks Ltd. This means that we are one step closer to bringing next generation broadband services to those businesses and people who need it most within our Borough.

Within the Causeway area, a total of 6,268 premises will be improved through Project Stratum. A full fibre solution, capable of offering speeds of up to 1 gigabit per second to almost 97% of premises in the target intervention area will be delivered.

The public investment of £165 million combined with Fibrus' substantial investment in network build costs, will help transform the broadband connectivity landscape for many of our citizens and businesses, primarily across rural areas.

Deployment by Fibrus of the new infrastructure commenced in November 2020 with the Ballycastle area one of the first locations in NI to be upgraded. The deployment will run until March 2024; with parts of Ballymoney and the Coleraine area to be upgraded in 2021. Please click on the following link for further details in relation to Project Stratum updates, coverage, roll-out dates and locations. <https://hyperfastni.com/>

### 3.2 Full Fibre NI Update

In January 2021, Council approved the award of the contract to Fibrus Networks Ltd to deliver full fibre broadband infrastructure as part of the Full Fibre Network NI (FFNI) consortium project.

This consortium of 10 Councils that has received funding of £15 million from the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). The funding will be used to install gigabit capable fibre 'direct to the premises' of Council owned buildings by September 2021 that will in turn increase the broadband infrastructure in the surrounding vicinity.

Within Causeway Coast and Glens, we hope to connect approximately 91 public sector buildings with Ultrafast 1000gb connections. Deadlines for project completion are March 2021 for Rural Gigabit Connectivity (RGC) sites and September 2021 for FFNI sites.

For the Council's geographical area, the funding is expected to deliver fibre connectivity to 56 of the Council's own sites, and 35 Business Services Organisation (BSO) sites. The BSO sites will use the grant funding to connect Health (Doctors' surgeries for example), Fire and Ambulance sites.

Officers will continue to work with Fibrus Networks Limited to confirm the proposed interventions for each Phase and Officers will determine the effect that the orders would have on the Council's own network plans and calculate the cost implications of the orders.

### 3.3 Digital Strategy

In December 2020 L&D Committee endorsed Council's new Digital Strategy for the Borough. The new Digital Strategy provides a clear vision within the digital sector to drive, accelerate and sustain economic and social development throughout the Borough. It will also help support any potential digital initiatives emerging as part of the Causeway Growth Deal.

The digital strategy was developed in parallel with, and is informed by, the new Economic Development Strategy for Causeway Coast and Glens and takes into account a range of digital strategies, initiatives and developments from the UK and beyond that establish the context for development in the Borough.

The Digital Strategy specifically focuses on three key areas i.e.:

- a) **Digital Infrastructure** – To ensure current and emerging digital technologies are available and accessible to all.
- b) **Digital Sector (including businesses)** – To support digital transformation of key economic sectors to ensure their sustainability and growth.
- c) **Digital Skills** – To establish a digital skills ecosystem for the Borough – both directly within the Borough, and as a conduit for skills regionally and beyond.

The Digital Strategy was approved by Council in January 21 and is currently subject to equality screening and consultation.

### 3.4 Growth Deal

CC&G is set to receive £72m capital funding for a Growth Deal after the NI Executive agreed to match fund the UK Government's Growth Deal allocation. The Growth Deal capital fund will be used to support digital and innovation projects. The Executive investment will focus additional funding on supporting Infrastructure, tourism, and regeneration along with employability and skills.

In line with Growth Deal criteria, it is critical that Council prioritises key catalyst projects over the next 10-years to help shape and grow our local economy.

Following members commitment to a Growth Deal in October 2019, Council established a Growth Deal Working Group to deliver upon each of the key priorities identified above. The Growth Deal Working Group have identified six key themes/ sectors to help grow our local economy in line with Growth Deal criteria, and Digital Connectivity is a key pillar within the proposed Growth Deal going forward.