

## AGENDA ITEM 8

REPORT TO THE TEES VALLEY  
COMBINED AUTHORITY CABINET28<sup>th</sup> JANUARY 2022

## REPORT OF CHIEF DIGITAL OFFICER

## TEES VALLEY DIGITAL STRATEGY

## SUMMARY

This report presents the Tees Valley Digital Strategy, a long term 10-year strategy, setting out our digital ambition and priorities, covering digital infrastructure, innovation and inclusion.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Combined Authority Cabinet approves the Tees Valley Digital Strategy.

## DETAIL

The Tees Valley Digital Strategy sets out a single ambition “*Enabling the Tees Valley to become the UK’s first truly Smart Region by 2032. Our economy will be underpinned by world leading digital infrastructure and innovative technologies that enable access and opportunity for all residents and businesses*”. This ambition is proposed to be delivered through three key foundations:

- **Infrastructure** – ensuring high speed digital connectivity for all businesses and homes across the region. Digital Infrastructure is critical for our global competitiveness and creating opportunity across business and communities.
- **Innovation** – establishing the Tees Valley as a global centre of digital innovation, research and practice. Digital innovation will drive the success of our key industry clusters and support our transition to Net Zero, including Clean Energy production and Advanced Manufacturing.
- **Inclusion and skills** – ensuring all communities are digitally connected, with the digital skills to access education, jobs, health, social care and other public services, wherever they live.

This strategy is wider than a strategy for just the digital industry sector – it is a regional digital strategy which addresses the wider requirements for digital infrastructure and innovation that will support the development of local businesses across all industry sectors now and in the future and allow for inclusive growth so that all residents and businesses can access digital technology.

This Strategy will act as a framework to inform all aspects of digital activity across the Tees Valley that support economic growth and levelling-up the economy. The Strategy is also

intended to help shape discussions, facilitate partnership development with government, industry and other bodies, and help secure public funding and private investment to deliver current and future initiatives.

In identifying the long-term strategic aims and ambitions for the Tees Valley, this is intended to be a 10-year Strategy. However, digital technologies and their applications are constantly evolving and therefore detailed actions will be published in a separate Digital Strategy Delivery Plan (to be presented at a subsequent Cabinet meeting for approval) which will be agreed and reviewed annually by TVCA and partners across Tees Valley to ensure we remain at the forefront of digital development. Digital will remain a cross cutting theme in all Combined Authority group plans and strategies.

## **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

As part of the Tees Valley Investment Plan 2019-29 there was £2 million allocated to a digital 'Cyber Range' project under Research, Development and Innovation. £500k of this has been allocated to the Teesside University Industrial Digitisation Technology Centre via a Delegated Decision leaving £1.5 million innovation enabling funding. There is now a large amount of digital infrastructure investment proposed in the Tees Valley, which is due to be secured through other means, therefore it is proposed that this remaining £1.5 million is allocated to maximising these opportunities through building capacity and capability to drive digital innovation to benefit businesses and residents within Tees Valley.

There are no other direct financial asks as part of the overarching Digital Strategy, however the Strategy Delivery Plan will contain details of any other financial implications. This will be presented at a subsequent Cabinet meeting for approval where it relates to use of TVCA resources. The Delivery Plan will also identify opportunities to leverage government and private sector resources to achieve our priorities.

## **ASSURANCE**

Cabinet approval would allocate the funds to the Programme and the approval of business cases would be delegated in line with the Assurance Framework to the TVCA Group Chief Executive in consultation with the TVCA Management Group, Section 73 Officer and Monitoring Officer.

## **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

None

## **RISK ASSESSMENT**

None

## **CONSULTATION & COMMUNICATION**

A 'Tees Valley Digital Strategy Development Group' was formed in July 2021, consisting of representation from the five Tees Valley Local Authorities, Teesside University, Digital Catapult and the digital LEP lead. Business engagement has been through the Business Representation Organisation group consisting of NECC, FSB, CBI and others. The Voluntary and Community sector have been engaged in the strategy development through key contacts at VONNE, Hope Foundation and Hartlepower.

## **EQUALITY & DIVERSITY**

The Tees Valley Digital Strategy highlights that the Tees Valley has a diversity and inclusion challenge with an under-representation of women and BAME communities in the technology workforce. The Strategy Delivery Plan will identify actions to address this.

## **LOCAL ENTERPRISE PARTNERSHIP**

Mark South as Digital LEP lead has been engaged as part of the Tees Valley Digital Strategy Development group and is supportive of the development of the strategy.

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