

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Bulletin Summary – Digital Innovation Zone

Overview: Following a workshop on 27 July 2023, Members raised the issue of the Digital Innovation Zone (DIZ) and sought background summary information on its role and how the Essex DIZ connects with local businesses and residents to share the benefits of digital investment and how this benefits the council and residents.

The DIZ Vision:

“to be the best connected place of its type in the UK. A place of innovation and inclusion. A place where the benefits of digital investment are harnessed, maximised and shared across residents, commuters, businesses and borders”.

As a partnership it attempts to answer how economic prosperity can be future proofed, how it can better use its assets to lever in additional investment from the private sector and / or government to go “further, faster” and work better together to deliver more public services in a joined-up way that costs less and provides more.

Partners:

The DIZ is comprised of an Executive Board, an Advisory Board and the DIZ team.

The **Executive Board** is comprised of the funding local authorities including East Herts DC alongside Broxbourne Borough Council, Epping District Council, Harlow Council, Uttlesford District Council, Essex County Council and Hertfordshire County Council.

The **Advisory Board** is a more flexible, place-based and evolving community of interested organisations from across and beyond the DIZ which includes representatives from the health, voluntary and community, higher and further education sectors. The private sector is also represented by global companies such as CGI and Microsoft and local SMEs such as Insight MCL (from East Herts).

Support:

The strategy shapes the work of the DIZ over the short and long term and is supported by the various organisations (list above) working in partnership.

A key role of the DIZ is to examine programmes and projects that have been successfully tested or been applied in “smart cities” to assess their benefit to a particular area (i.e. a mixture of small urban market towns and rural surroundings that reflects the economic and social makeup of the rest of the UK).

Collaborative working is critical to the successful delivery of the DIZ work programme and is facilitated through both the Advisory board monthly meetings with focused presentations on key digital issues and shared events with key speakers on specifically digital related topics to inform and consult with local organisations affected by a specific topic. A list of Executive reports from earlier seminars are available [here](#) for Members’ further information.

The ongoing DIZ work programme is shaped by the Executive Board and delivered by the DIZ Team (DIZ Director and Programme Manager). Progress is reported monthly to the Executive Board and annually to the wider community through its Annual Progress Reports (all available on the DIZ website at <https://diz.org.uk/diz-resources/>)

Some key achievements and highlights from the ongoing work programme include:

- Delivery of a £1.7m DCMS funded project to deliver ultrafast fibre connectivity to 74 GP surgeries. This included 13 GPs in East Herts with over 29km of fibre infrastructure built in the district; this has both underpinned the move to digital healthcare delivery during COVID and provided the foundations to explore future healthcare innovation.
- Collaborative procurement by all DIZ districts of a town centre footfall system to enable detailed analysis of shopping and visiting patterns across all DIZ town centres
- Delivery of a series of Smart Place Seminars on key digital issues including infrastructure, health and social care, digital skills, digital inclusion, digital sustainability and the potential of 5G connectivity. These were open to local businesses and residents.
- DIZ was recognised by Digital Leaders in their annual #DL100 Awards as the 'Cross-Sector Collaboration of the Year'.
- Establishment of a 'Digital Sustainability Special Interest Group' which is exploring how digital can '#domoregood' environmentally as well as reducing the negative impacts of increasingly digital service delivery by local authorities and the wider public sector.
- Continued liaison with health partners to evaluate the impact of the GP fibre project and to explore opportunities to use that connectivity to bring benefits for residents.
- Collaborative work across administrative boundaries to develop funding bids and project proposals for digital innovation across 'the place' e.g. DSIT 5G Innovation Regions
- Collaborative work to explore the potential for public sector assets to be made available to support the deployment and densification of telecoms infrastructure eg. 5G small cell units.
- Comprehensive digital 'horizon scanning' through the weekly DIZ newsletter to raise awareness of key digital issues, events, articles and resources – available to all members

The Lead Member for East Herts Council is Councillor Glover-Ward.

Officers' observations / comments

If Members need further information, please let me know in advance of the next meeting of O&S Committee on 7 November 2023 when this can be discussed in the context of the Work Programme. (Please note that Digital exclusion (literacy) is being progressed as a separate topic).

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