REPORT TO: Employment, Learning, Skills
& Community Policy & Performance
Board

DATE: 8 June 2011

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director Policy and Resources

SUBJECT: Halton Digital Economy and Inclusion
Strategy

WARDS: Borough Wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 A Digital Economy and Inclusion Strategy (DEIS) and supporting evidence paper has been produced for Halton. Consultation has taken place with stakeholders and comments incorporated. A draft action plan has now been produced with suggested delivery vehicles and estimated costs.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That

   i.   The strategy is scrutinised in terms of adding further actions, prioritising actions or highlighting barriers to those suggested.
   ii.   The Board recommends adoption of the strategy by the Executive Board.

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

This strategy targets Next Generation Access (NGA) Broadband as a mechanism for driving economic development and social inclusion in Halton.

The term 'next-generation access' (NGA) refers to superfast broadband that is enabled by replacing current technology such as copper phone lines with new technology, such as fibre-optic cable (fibre) and the latest fixed and mobile wireless technologies. NGA achieves speeds above 50Mbps (Megabits per second). The network in Halton currently achieves 2 – 20Mbps.

New communications technologies not only help businesses trade and develop; they also create opportunities for businesses to develop new applications and services. These new applications and services increase demand for faster and better communications facilities, which in turn leads to more innovation in applications and services in a development spiral. Connecting people to ICT skills can connect them to new or better jobs, to new forms of communication and social interaction, to community infrastructures and government services, to information to help with homework, to consumer power and convenience. It can save people time and money, open new doors and new worlds. Digital inequality matters because those without the right combination of access, skill, motivation or knowledge

to make digital decisions are missing out in all areas of life. And that doesn't just impact on individual lives but on families, communities, on political processes, democracy, public services and the economic and social health of the nation as a whole.

The Definition of Digital Exclusion: Being prevented (by skills, equipment, motivation or some other factor) from going online and using new technologies.

Definition of Digital Inclusion: The incorporation of information technologies into the community in order to promote education and improve quality of life.

The Halton Digital Economy and Inclusion Strategy
The strategy consists of four elements -
1. Obtain Next Generation Access (NGA) Broadband for the Borough by driving demand for this utility (strategy elements 2,3,4)
2. Provide Businesses with the knowledge and skills to take advantage of NGA and related technology
3. Provide residents with the knowledge, skills and infrastructure for inclusion in the online world
4. Deliver more Council Services primarily online with backup via other channels.

For Halton's business and commerce to stay competitive in a modern and global economy essential infrastructure such as NGA is critical. Digital infrastructure is essential in retaining and attracting businesses within Halton. The focus on the strategy is obtaining NGA for the Borough. The other key aims (elements 2,3,4 above) are targeted at driving up demand for NGA, thereby making Halton an attractive market for providers such as BT and Virgin Media to invest in NGA infrastructure without public sector intervention.

NGA Broadband group
As part of the DEIS implementation a 'NGA Broadband Innovation Group' will be established. It is proposed that this group consists of public and private sector membership and works towards completing a Broadband Delivery UK bid (BDUK) by the autumn of 2011. If the bid is successful it will enable broadband infrastructure to be upgraded within the Borough.

Public Private Partnerships will be promoted to deliver superfast broadband benefiting both residents and businesses. Initially the group would consist of Officers and local business representatives.

Next steps
The key milestones over the next six months are;
- Consultation with businesses July 2011
- Executive Board to adopt strategy August 2011
- Establish NGA broadband group
- Submit full BDUK bid October 2011

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The strategy will have wide cross cutting implications across a wide range of policies, especially those supporting social inclusion and the economic agendas.

5.0 OTHER IMPLICATIONS

<u>Relevance to Developing the Wider Economy</u>
The document 'Future North West – Our Shared Priorities' (August 2010) that evolved from the work undertaken in the Region by 4NW as part of the drafting of RS2010 highlighted 'Big Ticket Issues' to be addressed across the North West. Of the 12 Big Ticket items listed, four will be directly impacted by this strategy:

- Develop the enterprise capabilities of our people through education and skills.
- Develop our world-leading advanced manufacturing, biomedical and digital and creative industries.
- Develop our world-class research, science and innovation capability, particularly at Daresbury.
- Develop Next Generation Access digital connectivity.

'Future North West' also has four Thematic Areas:

Low Carbon, Climate Change and Resource Efficiency
- Exploit opportunities in other low carbon and environmental goods and services.

Competitive Advantage and Distinctiveness
- Develop our strength in internationally competitive manufacturing, biomedical and digital and creative industries.
- Strengthen our concentration of knowledge-based assets driven by our universities and research, science and innovation base.

Release Potential and Tackle Poverty
- Increase the potential of the workforce by improving employment levels and skills.
- Revitalise areas with deep-seated economic and social challenges and build strong communities.

Housing and Infrastructure
- Ensure high-quality digital connectivity to stimulate enterprise, improve service delivery and reduce the need to travel.

Although the regional work is now shelved, the evidence base upon which it was prepared remains valid. To ensure that Halton remains competitive internationally a strategy is needed to support the knowledge based economy and support the delivery of NGA infrastructure.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

The cross cutting nature of this strategy means it will have impact across all of the Council's priorities.

7.0   RISK ANALYSIS

Risks have been managed so that components of the strategy can be implemented on a nil cost basis. Elements of strategy that require financial commitment are to be implemented via social enterprise and public private partnership so that any residual risk and costs can be shared.

8.0   EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

The strategy will lead to wider social inclusion across the borough, offer opportunities for community cohesion, access to health and employment information, and allow the acquisition of digital life skills for all.