



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Development Committee
Subject:	Digital Infrastructure Developments and Opportunities
Date:	16 March 2011
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1	Relevant Background Information
1.1	Belfast and the wider region have the potential to win new investment and business opportunities due to a number of investments in the digital infrastructure in recent years, most notably Project Kelvin and British Telecom's "Next Generation Broadband" Programme.
1.2	<p>The city of Derry/Londonderry recently started to develop a digital strategy in light of the potential opportunities on offer as stated in the Digital Northern Ireland 2020 interim report. Funded by Derry City Council, Interreg and ILEX, the Digital Derry Strategy aims to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Raise awareness of the digital media sector2. Implement local initiatives to support business growth3. Animate digital content networks4. Raise the profile of the sector in the city.
1.3	<p>The bandwidth capacities and speeds are already being used as a selling point in promoting the region as a potential investment location. A recently commissioned report entitled "Digital NI 2020" focuses on identifying new opportunities for the local economy arising from this investment. A copy of this report is attached as Appendix 1.</p> <p>This infrastructure investment is also being used as a platform for establishing and developing a range of business support mechanisms, focused on helping hi-tech companies to start-up, develop international contacts and increase access to investment.</p>

2	Key Issues
2.1	<p>The consultation exercise carried out in developing the Digital Northern Ireland 2020 strategy confirmed that there was significant potential to capitalise on opportunities in a number of areas. These include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. The use of advanced communications for our key business sectors.2. The use of advanced communications for community and social development.3. The foreign direct investment (FDI) opportunities in our ICT and Digital Media sectors.

<p>2.2</p> <p>2.3</p> <p>2.4</p> <p>2.5</p> <p>2.6</p>	<p>It identified the key selling points which put Northern Ireland in “pole position” in terms of economic growth and provide a unique local and regional offering in terms of business development and inward investment compared to other parts of the UK and Europe. These are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Fibre coverage across Northern Ireland to all major urban and business centres. 2. Dual links to North America from the island of Ireland, with full interconnection between the fibre networks in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. 3. Opportunity for a large number of businesses to have direct fibre access, thereby giving them access to very high speed communications of 1gigabyte and beyond. 4. Opportunity for fibre networks to extend into residential accommodation providing higher speeds to interactive services and social activity. 5. Availability of research expertise through high quality universities and research centres. 6. Shortest latency across the Atlantic, resulting in faster and larger communications between Northern Ireland and USA. <p>There are significant opportunities for Belfast City Council as well as businesses located within the council area. These opportunities will be captured through the Belfast Masterplan and Integrated Economic Strategy for Belfast although practical action needs to commence in the short term.</p> <p>Belfast City Council currently runs a series of initiatives and programmes to support the development of the creative industries in Belfast, with a focus on Digital Media, Film and TV, Music and Design. Our creative industries plan is similar to that of the Derry Digital strategy in that projects are aimed at supporting business growth, raising awareness of the sector, facilitating networks and encouraging inward investment into the city. Further development of our creative industries plan can be tailored to lay the foundation for the development of a ‘Digital Strategy’ for Belfast, however, additional work would need to be carried out to examine what opportunities are available for the wider council and its services and the city as a whole, in terms of the technical infrastructures outlined in the Digital Northern Ireland 2020 document.</p> <p>In this regard, Belfast City Council has been approached by both Northern Ireland Science Park and global technology company IBM, to help facilitate two new initiatives to help stimulate entrepreneurship, economic growth and inward investment in to the city.</p> <p>The Northern Ireland Science Park initiative is an Enterprise Forum which creates an opportunity for science and technology sector leaders across all industries to network and develop collaborative initiatives to support new business start-ups and to enhance technology commercialisation. The first event to be organised by the forum is the “NASDAQ versus AIM: Smackdown!” due to take place on Wednesday 25 May 2011. This event will bring together NASDAQ Board Member Tom O’Neill and Marcus Stuttard, Head of AIM, London Stock Exchange’s international market for smaller growing companies. The speakers will provide perspectives on where Northern Ireland’s hottest entrepreneurs might hope to float their company and to look at whether a NASDAQ listing a realistic goal. Council officers have been invited to join the Steering Group for this work.</p>
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2.8	In addition, IBM has recently made contact to discuss the possibility of developing closer linkages between the company and Belfast City Council. The company is considering introducing a number of initiatives in the region and is keen to engage with Belfast City Council in the research and development of these initiatives. The first initiative is the development of an IBM Smart Camp in the city. The Smart Camp is an IBM initiative to identify, encourage and support new hi-tech entrepreneurs working to tackle some of the pressing environmental and social challenges such as water provision, transportation development and healthcare delivery.
2.9	IBM wishes to host, in partnership with Belfast City Council, the first Smart Camp in Belfast to identify new entrepreneurs with the potential to become "IBM Global Entrepreneur of the Year." IBM have asked Belfast City Council to help support this initiative by hosting Smart Camp Belfast in City Hall, in May 2011, and with the marketing and identification of potential participants.

3	Resource Implications
3.1	Costs associated with Smart Camp event in Belfast City Hall will not exceed £2,000.

4	Equality and Good Relations Considerations
4.1	No specific good relations considerations. Participation in these events will be open to all interested companies.

5	Recommendations
5.1	Members are asked to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Agree to establish a working group to explore the opportunities for Belfast in relation to the Digital NI 2020 strategy. – Agree to support the development of a Digital Strategy for Belfast up to a maximum of £10,000. – Approve engagement with Northern Ireland Science Park on the NISP Connect enterprise forum. – Agree to host the IBM Smart Camp event in Belfast City Hall in May 2011 at a cost not exceeding £2,000. – Agree to engage in further discussions with IBM in the research and development of new initiatives of benefit to the Council and the city.

6	Decision Tracking
Updates on progress to be provided to Members following the May 2011 event.	

7	Key to Abbreviations
FDI – Foreign Direct Investment NISP – Northern Ireland Science Park	

8	Documents Attached
Appendix 1 – Copy of 'Digital NI 2020' report.	