

## MINUTES

### Transportation, Safety and Emergency Services

#### SPECIAL STRATEGIC POLICY COMMITTEE MEETING

12 May 2022

#### Attendees:

Councillor Paul Ward; Councillor Anne Connolly; Councillor Angela Feeney.

Councillor Colm Kenny;

#### Special Guests:

Padraic McGuinness of PMG Consult.

#### Also Present:

Evelyn Wright, Director of Services; Lorcan Brennan, A/Senior Executive Engineer;

Rory Hopkins, Head of Information Systems; Pamela Pender, A/Senior Executive Officer

#### Introduction

Cathaoirleach Paul Ward welcomed the members of the Special sitting of the SPC to receive a briefing from guest speaker Padraic McGuinness of PMG Consult on the emerging Kildare Digital Strategy.

#### Item 1 – Kildare Digital Strategy -Presentation from Padraic McGuinness of PMG Consultant

Padraic McGuinness of PMG Consult thanked the members for receiving the briefing today and looked forward to receiving the members comments at the end.

He updated the members on the analysis carried out following the public consultation & stakeholder engagement. Padraic also referenced the timing of the Strategy for Kildare given that Government had recently launched National Digital Strategy to

2030 – Harnessing Digital. The 5 Pillars forming the framework for Kildare’s Strategy document aligns very well with the National document.

- Digital Economy
- Digital Infrastructure
- Digital Skills
- Digital Society
- Digital Services

Padraic commented favourably on the low number of Broadband Connection Points (BCPs) for Kildare of which there are 3. It is reflective of the low intervention area in Kildare associated with the National Broadband Plan.

Key findings of the analysis include:

- Kildare is launching at a time when the community is ready to embrace it. The Digital agenda has moved forward significantly over the last 2 years with the use of digital tools synonymous with on-line education and remote working.
- MERITS – regional Hub for technology start-ups and entrepreneurs working with partners Enterprise Ireland, Kildare LEO, MaynoothWorks, Kildare Chamber and Regional Skills Forum.
- Green Economy – supported through The Just Transition Fund at Allenwood Enterprise Park providing facilities for start-up’s and investors in the future decarbonised economy.
- Exclusion arose as an issue highlighted during the consultation period. People can be left behind if the digital agenda moves along at pace. The PPN and the Digital Team (post Strategy) need to inform and engage with the public around assistance, training etc.

Padraic highlighted briefly some the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats identified. Kildare has several significant strengths that sets the bar high among peer counties. The perception of a Rural/Urban divide is also a key



weakness, particularly in Kildare South and the North West region of Kildare. Connectivity has emerged as a key finding and this would align with the National Broadband Plan intervention area where most pockets are within the South and North West area of Kildare. Cllr Ward was delighted to see Ireland rank 5<sup>th</sup> in the EU Digital Economy & Society Index (DESI) since its introduction in 2014. However, he confirmed that connectivity is the key theme across representations received in relation to Broadband and working from home. The Rural Urban divide as mentioned earlier, is a significant weakness and we need to include a tangible action in our Framework that people recognise. Cllr Connolly agreed with the Chair's comments and thanked Padraic for taking their recommendations from the February meeting on board. She welcomed the actions emerging to deal with the connectivity issues.

Padraic advised that there may be room to expand on the BCP model, to replicate their activity in other areas working with Government Departments and National Broadband Ireland. It will be at least 2 years before Kildare South is connected under the Broadband Plan. There are a number of significant 'black spots' in the County, we could assess and gather data on those areas and present to DRCD and NBI.

Cllr Feeney welcomed the findings of the Youth Survey engagement having provided Transition Year information to our February meeting assisting with the consultation process. She asked that this remains open to allow further engagement. Padraic confirmed that this was possible and agreed to leave the survey open for feedback. Cllr Connolly asked how we get the message out to the Schools and it was agreed that the KWETB would be asked to circulate a notice to all schools in their remit asking students to participate in the Youth Survey.

Rory confirmed that once the Strategy is adopted a committee will be established to monitor the actions from the report and advocate in areas where connectivity issues arise. Bringing in a BCP or similar model brings high fibre to the area. Rory also reiterated to the members that the development of a Digital Strategy was a key factor in the National Broadband Plan rollout, with each local authority developing a document for their area.

Cllr Paul Ward.



Padraic confirmed that he would take the comments away for consideration and develop a Broadband/Connectivity Action to include in the Framework.

Cllr Kenny raised the matter of 'WiFi' and its use for practical purposes and not just for public use. Areas for inclusion are:

- Parking signs
- Air Quality Monitors
- Independent standing Speed Limit signs

Padraic directed Cllr Kenny towards Pillar 2 of the Strategy and the consideration of these items in the preparation of Town & Village Renewal Plans. Internet of Things or smart planning forms part of the design for the masterplan. Rory confirmed there is a difference between WiFi (wireless) and 5G (connectivity) and both should not be confused. Padraic agreed to provide a 5G coverage map for the County in the Draft document.

Evelyn Wright, Director of Services closed the meeting, thanking Padraic for his great work and the gathering of a vast amount of information to help feed our Strategy document. She also reminded the Committee that in 2016/2017 several BPC locations were identified and although not progressed it may be possible to revisit this list again. She also raised concerns about the use of the phrase 'digital poverty' and felt it gave an indication of affordability rather than accessibility. It was agreed that this phrase would be amended and not included in the final document. Evelyn also confirmed the need to get funding in place to improve the digital rollout. The LECP is possibly the best forum to ensure we get our communication out to everyone. Actions are required to fill the gaps where they are identified. We need to finalise our pathway now that we have the framework.

Padraic thanked the members for their time and engagement which will assist in developing the appropriate actions to emerge from the Digital Strategy.

The meeting ended.