Executive Report

Milton Keynes City Council

Delegated Decisions - 19 March 2024

MILTON KEYNES CITY TECHNOLOGY, SMART CITY, DIGITAL AND CREATIVE INDUSTRIES STRATEGY 2024-2029

Name of Cabinet Member	**Councillor Shanika Mahendran** (Cabinet member for Climate, Sustainability and Innovation)
Report sponsor	**Paul Thomas** Director of Planning and Placemaking
Report author	**Sophie Lloyd** Head of Economic Development sophie.lloyd@milton-keynes.gov.uk / 01908 253208

Exempt / confidential / not for publication	**No**
Council Plan reference	**Ref number 12**
Wards affected	**All wards**

Executive Summary

The Council Plan Delivery Plan for 2023/2024 set out a commitment 'to develop a five-year Smart City, Digital, Tech and Creative Industries Strategy to build on Milton Keynes' global reputation as a smart city and home of innovation'. This decision is to adopt the Strategy.

1. Proposed Decisions

1.1 That the Milton Keynes Technology, Smart City, Digital and Creative Industries Strategy 2024/29 be adopted.

1.2 That authority be delegated to the Director of Planning and Placemaking, in consultation with the Cabinet member for Climate, Sustainability and Innovation, to make consequential and other minor grammatical, formatting, and photographic changes to the final documents as required.

2. Reasons for the Decision?

2.1 To deliver commitment 12 from the Council Plan Delivery Plan 2023/2024 'to develop a five-year Smart City Digital, Tech and Creative Industries Strategy to build on Milton Keynes' global reputation as a smart city and home of innovation'.

3. Background to the Decision

3.1 The Council Plan Delivery Plan for 2023/2024 set out a commitment "to develop a five-year Smart City, Digital, Tech and Creative Industries Strategy to build on Milton Keynes' global reputation as a smart city and home of innovation." We have been undertaking work throughout 2023 and 2024, to develop the city as a leading location for these sectors.

<u>Technology</u>

3.2 In late 2022, the Milton Keynes Tech Ecosystem report was published, highlighting the existing strengths Milton Keynes has as a leading UK tech city, including that one in three jobs in Milton Keynes already work in tech. The report identified a number of areas of opportunity and challenge for the city's tech ecosystem, in order to improve its position as a leading UK tech city.

3.3 Since the publication of the report, we have been taking forward work to develop the tech ecosystem in the city. Throughout 2023, this has included roundtables with anchor tech employers, entrepreneurs and investors and educators in the city. We worked in partnership with local not-for-profit initiative Protospace to deliver this work. In February 2024, the first 'front page' website for technology in Milton Keynes was launched - [Technology in Milton Keynes - Protospace](#)- providing information on tech events, organisations, facilities, and the city of Milton Keynes in one place.

3.4 Four emergent streams of work were identified through this stakeholder engagement as priorities which are now being taken forwards: brand and marketing of Milton Keynes; talent and skills; entrepreneurship and innovation; and sense of gateway and place. We are currently running a grant process to identify a partner to support its aims throughout 2024, with a decision due to be made by Friday 22 March 2024.

<u>Smart City</u>

3.5 Milton Keynes has been a leading UK Smart City since 2014, when the successful three-year MK:Smart programme was launched. This highly influential initiative shaped the Smart City agenda internationally, winning recognition for the city on the international stage and firmly establishing Milton Keynes' reputation as one of the leading smart cities in the world.

3.6 Milton Keynes continues to be recognised internationally as a Smart City. In 2024, we have three Smart City trials currently live exploring the future of connected and autonomous vehicles, urban drone deliveries, and advanced radio communications. We are also planning a relaunch of the MK Smart brand with the Open University to build on the continued brand recognition.

<u>Digital</u>

3.7 In 2018, we published the first [Digital Strategy](#) for Milton Keynes (2018-2025.) It identified priorities of digital connectivity, digital services, digital inclusion, and the digital economy. Significant progress has been made since 2018 on

these workstreams. Milton Keynes has reached 99.4% superfast and fibre connectivity and we have over 180 digital services developed for citizens' convenience and supported a number of digital inclusion initiatives during the pandemic. Finally, we have continued to develop Milton Keynes as a leading economy in which to locate a digital business.

3.8   This strategy updates and replaces the 2018-2025 Milton Keynes Digital Strategy. It explores the city's achievements since the 2018 publication, and sets out the areas of focus for the next five years.

<u>Creative Industries</u>

3.9   Milton Keynes is already the home of over 1,800 creative industries firms, and the city has strong specialisms in film, media and design, with the sector experiencing strong growth over the past ten years. A healthy creative sector is beneficial for our aims of being a leading UK tech city, recognising the interlink between tech and creativity.

3.10   In 2024, the City Council refreshed its Creative and Cultural strategy. Within this update was an aim to "embrace advances in technology as part of city's cultural landscape." Both the Creative and Cultural strategy and this five year strategy outline the importance of the development of the creative sector to deliver our ambition of being a leading UK tech city.

4.   Implications of the Decision

Financial	N	Human rights, equalities, diversity	N
Legal	Y	Policies or Council Plan	Y
Communication	N	Procurement	N
Energy Efficiency	N	Subsidy	N
Workforce	N	Other	N

(a)   Financial Implications

The Strategy will be delivered from within existing MKCC service budgets and reserves allocated to work on the tech ecosystem project through the Delegated Decision on 10 October 2023. No further financial commitments are made through this Delegated Decision.

(b)   Legal Implications

The Council has general powers of competence under section 1 of the Localism Act 2011 to do anything that an individual can do subject to statutory limitations and can therefore adopt the strategy as recommended. If adopted, implementation of the strategy including award of any grants will need to adhere to the Council's contracts procedure rules and financial regulations including complying with subsidy control legislation.

<blockquote>
(c)   Policy Implications

If the Delegated Decision passes, the five-year Smart City, Digital, Tech and Creative Industries Strategy will set the policy direction for future Milton Keynes City Council initiatives on these sectors. This Strategy replaces and updates the Milton Keynes Digital Strategy 2018-2025.
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5.   Alternatives Considered

<u>To Do Nothing</u>

5.1   The alternative to adopting this strategy as Milton Keynes City Council policy is continue without a strategy. This will fail to capitalise on the current opportunities the city faces, and will fail to deliver the Council Plan commitment.

6.   Timetable for Implementation

Action	Date
Adoption of the five year Five-year Smart City, Digital, Tech and Creative Industries Strategy (2024-2029)	19 March 2024
Relaunch of MK:Smart with Open University	March 2024
Publication of a Smart City Action Plan	October 2024

List of annexes

Annex   The Milton Keynes Five-year Smart City, Digital, Tech and Creative Industries Strategy (2024-2029)

List of Background Papers

Milton Keynes Digital Strategy 2018-2025 - FV.pdf (milton-keynes.gov.uk)

Delegated Decision, October 2023 - To Allocate Funding to Tech Strategy
Agenda for Delegated Decisions on Tuesday 10th October, 2023, 5.30 pm | Milton Keynes City Council (moderngov.co.uk)