



Comhairle Chontae Liatroma  
Leitrim County Council

# Digital Placemaking: A Strategy for a Connected Leitrim

[www.leitrim.ie](http://www.leitrim.ie)

# Contents

1	Introduction	6
1.1	Background	7
1.2	Current Strategic Vision and Priorities	9
2	Digital Environment and Context	11
2.1	Social, Economic & Technological Context	11
2.2	Strategic and Policy Context	19
3	Current Position	25
3.1	Progress made through Digital Leitrim 2022-2025	25
3.2	Consultation process Digital Placemaking: A Strategy for a Connected Leitrim	30
3.3	What The Consultation Process told us	31
3.4	SWOT Analysis of the Current Digital Landscape	39
4	The Vision	42
4.1	Our Vision	42
4.2	Thematic pillars and Objectives	42
4.3	Action Plan to Effect Change	44
5	Our implementation plan	65
5.1	How supports Will Be Implemented	65
5.2	Council service delivery priorities	66
	Annex 1 Priority Actions aligned to Digital Leitrim 2022- 2025	67
	Annex 2 Survey Responses	69

# Foreword

## Introduction by the Chief Executive and Cathaoirleach of Leitrim County Council

We are delighted to introduce Digital Placemaking: A Strategy for a Connected Leitrim, our new digital placemaking strategy and action plan, building upon the achievements of Digital Leitrim 2022–2025. This next phase focuses on how digital innovation can enhance Leitrim’s towns, villages, and communities — strengthening connections between people, place, and technology. Through this strategy, we aim to empower our citizens, businesses, and public services to shape vibrant, inclusive, and sustainable places in an increasingly digital world.

Over the last three years, the roll out of the National Broadband Plan and development of digital assets such as our network of Connected Hubs have helped to create an environment where County Leitrim can be an active and connected place to live, work and do business. However, the pace of technological change continues to grow with innovations such as artificial intelligence, automation, robotics and green technologies creating both opportunities and challenges for the way we live and work. If we are to keep pace with these developments and integrate those which bring maximum benefit to our rural communities, we need to progress and build upon the work we have already undertaken.

We therefore want to focus our energy and commitment on facilitating the empowerment of our communities and businesses through increased access to digital solutions, enhanced

capacity to use those opportunities and confidence in maintaining personal and business security while engaging with digital technologies. We will also continue our work in transforming the way we deliver public services, ensuring citizens have access to safe and effective on-line services.

We realise that the actions we have identified in this Strategy and Action Plan are based on the digital environment in 2025 and new opportunities and challenges may present themselves during the period of its implementation. We will therefore remain flexible in our approach to implementation, ensuring we remain vigilant to new opportunities and innovative in our programmes of delivery.

We would like to thank everyone who engaged in the consultation process and helped to inform our Strategy priorities and key actions. We look forward to engaging with our partners and key stakeholders as we implement strategy objectives over the next four years.



*Joseph Gilhooly*  
**Joseph Gilhooly**  
Chief Executive



*Paddy Farrell*  
**Cllr Paddy Farrell**  
Cathaoirleach



# Executive Summary

**Digital Placemaking: A Strategy for a Connected Leitrim** outlines how Leitrim County Council seeks to support communities and businesses in Leitrim to actively embrace and participate in the development, adoption and use of digital technologies in community life and economic activities. It also outlines how the Council will embed digital technologies in the continued transformation and modernisation of its service delivery.

Although significant progress has been made to date through our first digital strategy Digital Leitrim 2022 - 2025, the development of this follow on Strategy has underscored the accelerating pace of technological change affecting businesses and communities. As a result, there is a continued need to raise awareness of both the opportunities and challenges presented by digital technologies, and to provide effective support for change and the adoption of new innovations.

Our discussions with community and business stakeholders indicate our Strategic Vision and Priorities remain appropriate and relevant, however additional areas of opportunity and need have been identified which build on our work to date. We recognise the need to:

- Increase our resilience to climate change and possible prolonged power outages as a result of adverse weather events or other factors.
- Understand and adopt opportunities to embrace emerging technologies such as Artificial Intelligence.
- Understand and embed increased cyber security awareness and practices across our community, business and public service activities.
- Ensure the pace of digital technology developments does not exclude sections of our community due to a lack of awareness, skills, confidence, or access.

Our vision for the next four years is:

Digital Placemaking: A Strategy for a Connected Leitrim reflects a County that is connected, progressive and responsive to the digital world and an increasingly digital future, while remaining true to its cultural heritage and protective of its natural environment.

Digital Leitrim is a better place to live and do business, where people are connected, included, empowered, safe and valued.

We will seek to realise that vision by focusing our work on four thematic pillars:

## Pillar 1 Infrastructure, Connectivity and Resilience

The Strategy will continue to encourage, support and advocate for digital infrastructure improvements across the County. It is considered essential that communities and businesses have access to high-speed broadband connections and mobile phone networks if they are to be able to engage with and maximise the benefits of digital transformation.

This strategic pillar will also incorporate a focus on emergency resilience, with action needed to ensure communities and businesses have access to effective systems to enable connectivity in the case of prolonged power failure.

## Pillar 2 Smart, Sustainable, Inclusive and Safe Communities

The Smart Communities Pillar will incorporate the additional priorities of cyber safety, inclusivity of all ages and abilities and the need to encourage increased sustainability in the way in which communities access and use services. Work undertaken will seek to ensure community members are able to access supports at their level of readiness aligned to their personal and community interests.

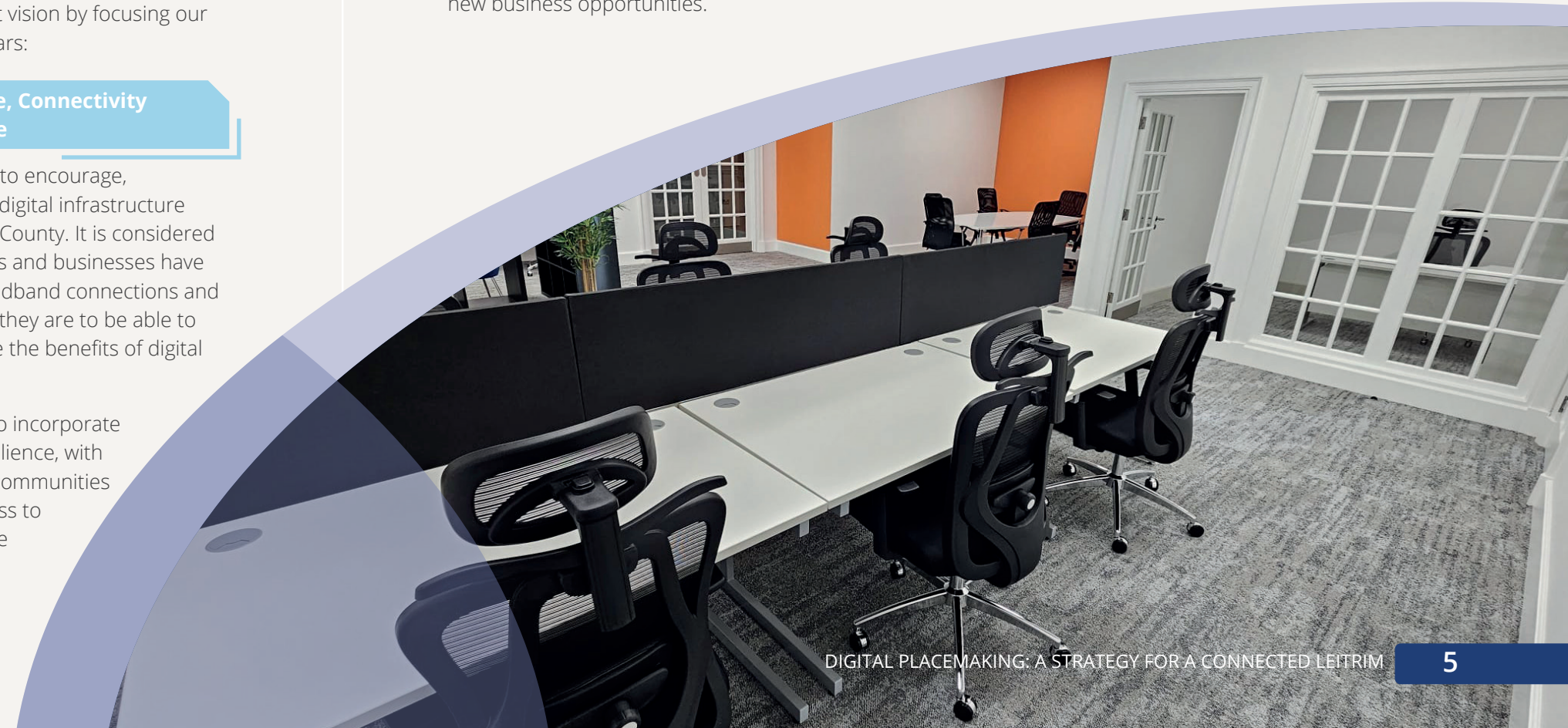
## Pillar 3 Digital Economy and Enterprise

The strategy will seek to empower and strengthen the capability of Leitrim business communities to participate in digital transformation. Through continued focus on enabling businesses to engage with digital technologies we aim to support the local economy to become more competitive locally and further afield. It is also hoped businesses will be able to innovate how they do business and identify new business opportunities.

## Pillar 4 Digital Transformation in Public Services

The Strategy will continue to place emphasis on the digitalisation and digital innovation of public service delivery. The new Strategy will seek to continue the drive towards more effective online service delivery for local citizens, ensure citizens are able to engage in democratic processes and retain control over their own data, identify and mobilise smart technologies for the benefit of citizens and improve the sustainability of public service delivery.

While our Vision and Strategic Priorities will set a consistent framework which will guide implementation, the actions included within this Strategy will evolve and will strive to keep pace with the opportunities technological change delivers over the next four years. The Strategy will therefore remain as an active and agile statement of intent which will guide the Council and its partners, offering a focus and framework for collaboration.



# 1 Introduction

Digital Placemaking outlines how Leitrim County Council seeks to support communities and businesses in Leitrim to actively embrace and participate in the development, adoption and use of digital technologies in community life and economic activities. It also outlines how the Council will embed digital technologies in the continued transformation and modernisation of service delivery.

This Strategy builds on the work undertaken through the Digital Leitrim Strategy 2022 -2025 which sought to stimulate and effect change under four Strategic Pillars, namely:

1. Infrastructure and Connectivity
2. Smart Communities
3. Digital Economy and Enterprise
4. Digital Transformation

Although significant progress has been made to date, the development of this Strategy has underscored the accelerating pace of technological change affecting businesses and communities. As a result, there is a continued need to raise awareness of both the opportunities and challenges presented by digital technologies, and to provide effective support for change and the adoption of new innovations.

Our goal is to enhance the quality of life for our citizens and make sure no one is left behind, excluded, or disadvantaged as a result of the transition to digital services, commerce and community. We also wish to ensure our business community is competitive and effective in a digitally connected world, with access to markets both locally and internationally.

Our discussions with community and business stakeholders, during the preparation of this new Strategy, indicate our Strategic Vision and Priorities remain appropriate and relevant, however additional areas of opportunity and need have been identified which build on our work to date. We recognise the need to:

- Increase our resilience to climate change and possible prolonged power outages as a result of adverse weather events or other factors.
- Understand and adopt opportunities to embrace emerging technologies such as Artificial Intelligence.
- Understand and embed increased cyber security awareness and practices across our community, business and public service activities.
- Ensure the pace of digital technology developments does not exclude sections of our community due to a lack of awareness, skills, confidence, or access.

While our Vision and Strategic Priorities will set a consistent framework which will guide implementation, the actions included within this Strategy will evolve and will strive to keep pace with the opportunities technological change delivers over the next four years. The Strategy will therefore remain as an active and agile statement of intent which will guide the Council and its partners, offering a focus and framework for collaboration.

We look forward to engaging with our communities, business sector and statutory partners in the delivery of this Strategy over the next four years. Throughout this time, we will remain vigilant to any legislative, policy or technological developments which occur and will consider how best we can flex and adapt to the issues they present.

## 1.1 Background

For most people, using digital technology is part of daily life, using digital skills to work, socialise, access healthcare, buy groceries, bank, and to make everyday tasks easier. As a consequence, people without the access, confidence and basic digital skills to use the internet face exclusion in our modern, digital world.

Access to and the capability to engage with digital technologies are key for citizens, communities and businesses, and has a fundamental role to play in ensuring the vibrancy of our rural communities.

A SHERPA discussion paper on Digitalisation in Rural Areas (April 2022) highlighted rural areas represent 83% of the total EU Territory, but are home to a declining share of the population (30.6%) compared to urban areas. It highlighted public consultation conducted by the European Commission (EC) 2021 confirmed limited access to essential services and infrastructures and lack of fast broadband are included among the main features of rural and remote areas and risk exacerbating depopulation, out-migration, ageing, skills deficits, and gender employment gaps. Consequently, the risk of social exclusion and poverty is higher in rural areas than in towns and cities. Digitalisation is recognised as having the potential to mitigate these problems, and as also indicated in the European Green Deal, to support the ecological transition and a sustainable growth.

A Good Practice Webinar organised by the Rural Pact Support Office (RPSO) as part of the EU Rural Vision training programme brought together 60 practitioners from 20 EU and four non-EU Member States in June 2023. It offered the opportunity to learn from experiences and initiatives that boost digital skills development in rural areas. Learning which emerged included:

- Digital connectivity, skills and access to equipment are the three key elements to ensuring digital transition.
- Digital skills initiatives should be inclusive and driven by local needs with tailored approaches responsive to community requirements.
- Initiatives should use simple communication styles showing the added value and benefits of digitalisation to ensure engagement and participation.

Access to the right digital skills and technologies also has a direct impact on the competitiveness and vibrancy of our business community.

The Intertrade Ireland Business Monitor for Q1 of 2025 indicates 38% of businesses who are trying to recruit have experienced difficulty finding the right skills. This is up from Q4 of 2024 when 24% of businesses were experiencing difficulty in retaining / attracting appropriate skills. In 2024 it was noted 7 out of 10 businesses who were experiencing difficulty in finding the right skills had vacancies, with 56% trying to address the issue with increasing recruitment activity/widening their search, but only 18% were investing more in training and development.



The level to which Irish businesses are proactively engaging with digital transformation varies and SMEs, which are a key feature of the business demographic in Leitrim, struggle to identify the right digital solutions and access the skills needed to embed technology in their activities. A survey by Google of 1,000 Irish SMEs in December 2021 indicated most Irish organisations were still in the process of adopting, developing and evolving their use of digital technologies, with:

- **11%** thinking about but not having done anything,
- **26%** having taken the first steps of digitalisation but still having a long way to go, and
- **25%** making progress but still not even halfway there.

The survey confirmed barriers and constraints to progression were - 42% lack of a clear strategy, 38% not knowing what to do/the correct sequence of innovation investment, 35% hiring staff with the right skills, 32% innovating to meet customer needs. The report also highlighted nearly 25% of firms on the Border region say meeting their digital skills objectives would enable them to export more (higher than any other region). These findings are supported by a survey in 2022 of 400 members of the Creative Frame network in Leitrim where 55% of respondents indicated they depend on digital technology to manage their business, however 29% were worried cost factors may limit their use of digital technology, 53% felt poor internet connection limits their use of technology and 22% believed lack of knowledge and skills limits their ability to use digital technology.

Co-ordinated and focused action is therefore required, through an updated Digital Strategy, to support communities and businesses in Leitrim to understand and adopt technology as an essential part of their activities.



## 1.2 Current Strategic Vision and Priorities

The Vision of Digital Leitrim 2022 – 2025 was:

*Digital Leitrim reflects a county that is connected, progressive and responsive to a digital future, while remaining true to its cultural heritage and protective of its natural environment*

The Strategy aimed to position Leitrim as a forward thinking, creative place that respects and protects its natural resources, environment, culture, people and their skills and talents. The Strategy identified four values that embodied this vision and acted as cornerstones for guiding Strategy implementation.

**Vibrant and Connected Towns:** Leitrim is creating exciting plans for revitalised and renewed town centres as attractive and purposeful places for its citizens and visitors.

**Reflective and Connected to Nature:** Leitrim is a place of quiet, unspoiled and hidden nature treasures. Its gentle and rugged countryside and charming towns make it a destination for balance in a fast moving digital age.

**Enterprising and Ambitious:** Leitrim has an established and dynamic micro-enterprise base and a small network of quality Hubs to support and drive an innovative and indigenous economy.

**Sustainable / Green & Low Carbon:** Leitrim is leading in the fields of micro renewable energy, resource efficiency and carbon reduction activities at a community, enterprise, infrastructural and institutional levels.

These values were designed to inspire and provide uniqueness of purpose for the Strategy and its partners.

The aim was that a Digital Leitrim would encompass the characteristics and capabilities in the graphic below.

Aligned to the expressed values the Strategy also outlined 4 strategic priorities / pillars, representing categories of activity, with a range of key actions identified against each strategic pillar, as outlined in Annex 1. These form the basis for the development of Digital Leitrim 2026-2029 with Digital Placemaking.

### CONNECTED COUNTY

The NBP will deliver over 11,000 fibre connections in Leitrim over the coming years. In the short-term 12 BCP & 4 to 5 Public Wifi Networks will be rolled-out.

### PROMOTING DIGITAL

Digital Leitrim will be a working strategy Digital Forum owned by its citizens and driven by a Digital Forum of key personnel in Leitrim County Council.

### ONLINE SERVICES

Leitrim County Council will be delivering virtual services and instant information relating to roads, housing, planning and many other activities and services.

### SMART COMMUNITIES

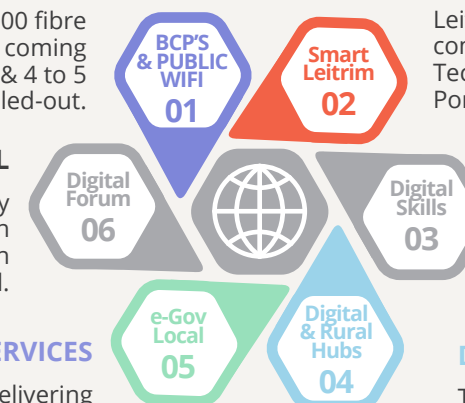
Leitrim will support the development of community / citizen led Smart Initiatives including Tech Town; SEC's; Connected Communities Portals; Digital Assisted Tourism schemes etc.

### DIGITAL KNOW HOW

Businesses and citizens in Leitrim will actively participate in digital learning and upskilling and adaptation to new digital tools.

### DIGITAL ECOSYSTEM

Through a network of large and small enterprise and rural hubs, entrepreneurs and remote workers will colocate & collaborate.





## 2 Digital Environment And Context

### 2.1 Social, Economic & Technological Context

#### 2.1.1 Ireland's Current Position In The Digital Ecosystem

The European Commission Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI) tracks progress on digital technology adoption across the EU, offering country profiles which help Member States identify priorities for action. The 2024 Digital Decade Country Report for Ireland indicated that in 2023 Ireland made “notable progress in FTTP infrastructure and invested significantly in the digital literacy of its population” with:

- **72.9%** of the population having at least basic digital skills, surpassing the EU average, with only the Netherlands and Finland having higher rates.
- **43.8%** of the population had ‘above basic digital skills’, the third highest in the EU and well above the EU average (27.3%).
- **87%** of households were covered with Very High-Capacity Networks (VHCN), above the EU average of **78.8%**.
- On FTTP, coverage was at **78.5%**, up from previous observed rate of **72.1%**, and above the EU average of **64.0%**. **37.6%** of fixed broadband subscriptions were based on FTTP, up from **28.9%** in the previous year.
- **81.2 %** of public services were available digitally for citizens and 100% of digital public services for businesses.
- **66.1%** of SMEs had at least a basic level of digital literacy.
- **21%** of business turnover at SME level came from e-commerce, the highest level in the EU and significantly above the EU average of **12%**. **30%** of Irish SMEs were selling online, among the top five countries, compared to an EU average of **19%**.
- The take-up of cloud solutions (intermediate or sophisticated cloud services) by Irish enterprises, at **53.1%**, was also well above the EU average (38.9%).

The report highlighted Ireland's ambition to be a digital leader at the heart of European and global digital development and the progress made in bolstering digital infrastructure, fostering innovation, improving digital literacy / skills and ensuring digital sovereignty. The work having been undertaken strengthening Ireland's position as a digital frontrunner on the global stage. It indicated, according to the World Trade Organisation (2023) Global Trade Outlook and Statistics, Ireland was the third largest exporter of digitally delivered services in the world.

However, the report noted “significant challenges persist in addressing the ICT specialists’ gap and in advancing e-Health initiatives, where progress is still slow”. It noted issues such as high business costs for network investment and skills shortages present potential impediments to progress.

Areas highlighted where improvement can be made include:

- Deploying 5G service in the 3.6 GHz band which enables high performance services to communities and business to business communications
- Increasing ICT skills and the level of people classified as ICT specialists (6.2% of people in 2023). 2024 Business Survey by Skillnet Ireland indicates **65%** of all businesses highlight their staff would require some form of digital upskilling in the coming years.
- Increasing the environmental sustainability of the digital sector, with only **20%** of businesses implementing energy efficient measures for ICT equipment.
- Take-up of AI where rates have stayed fairly static since 2021 (8% of enterprises in 2023 compared to 7.9% in 2021).

Key performance indicators illustrating Ireland's performance against EU averages are outlined in the following table:

Digital Decade KPI (1)	Ireland			EU		Digital Decade target by 2030	
	DESI 2023	DESI 2024	Annual progress	DESI 2024 (year 2023)	Annual progress	IE	EU
Fixed Very High-Capacity Network (VHCN)	83.8%	87.0%	3.8%	78.8%	7.4%	100%	100%
Fibre to the Premises (FTTP) coverage	72.1%	78.5%	8.9%	64.0%	3.5%	x	-
Semiconductors		NA					
Edge Nodes		24		1.186		x	10000
SMEs with at least a basic level of digital intensity	64.2%	66.1%	1.5%	57.7%	2.6%	90%	90%
Cloud	47.4%	53.1%	5.8%	38.9%	7.0%	75%	75%
Artificial Intelligence	7.9%	8.0%	0.6%	8.0%	2.6%	75%	75%
Data analytics	NA	37.1%	NA	33.2%	NA	75%	75%
AI or Cloud or Data analytics	NA	64.1%	NA	54.6%	NA		75%
Unicorns		12		263		x	500
At least basic digital skills	70.5%	72.9%	1.7%	55.6%	1.5%	80%	80%
ICT specialists	6.3%	6.2%	-1.6%	4.8%	4.3%	9.6%	-10%
e ID scheme notification		Yes					
Digital public services for citizens	81.1	81.2	0.2%	79.4	3.1%	100	100
Digital public services for businesses	100.0	100.0	0.0%	85.4	2.0%	100	100
Access to e-Health records	0.0	11.4		79.1	10.6%	80	100

Figure 1 Digital Decade Country Report - Ireland 2024 (European Commission)

Recommendations which were included for Ireland included:

- **CONNECTIVITY INFRASTRUCTURE:** Continue efforts to ensure full gigabit and 5G coverage, including by addressing operational bottlenecks such as permissions for telecoms mast deployment to extend mobile coverage.
- **EDGE NODES:** Explore opportunities for public-private partnerships and leverage funding mechanisms to support the rollout of edge nodes infrastructure.
- **CLOUD / DATA ANALYTICS:** Develop targeted programs and incentives to encourage enterprises and SMEs to adopt Big Data and AI and leverage their potential for innovation and growth; Stimulate the adoption of next generation cloud infrastructure and services by companies of all sizes.
- **CYBERSECURITY:** Continue the implementation of the 5G Cybersecurity Toolbox to ensure secure and resilient 5G networks.

- **ICT SPECIALISTS:** Expand apprenticeship programs, reskilling, and upskilling initiatives to meet the growing demand for ICT specialists, through a structural reform of the National Training Fund. Efforts should be continued in bridging the gender gap.
- **E-HEALTH:** Expand the coverage of the online access service to ensure that all citizens can access their electronic health data online.
- **GREEN TRANSITION:** Develop a coherent approach to twinning the digital and green transitions through - Firstly promoting improvements in energy and material efficiency of digital infrastructures, in particular data centres. Secondly, supporting the development and deployment of digital solutions that reduce the carbon footprint in other sectors, such as energy, transport, buildings, and agriculture, including the uptake of such solutions by SMEs.

Further information on specific key performance indicators can be accessed at the following link: DESI dashboard for the Digital Decade (2023 onwards) - Digital Decade DESI visualisation tool.



While progress towards digital transition places Ireland in a competitive position on a European and global stage, it should be noted that the picture within Ireland is not consistent across both urban and rural communities. The National Broadband Plan (NBP) seeks to address this issue and ensure citizens and businesses across remote areas have equitable access to the opportunities presented by a connected and digital economy, including access to high-speed broadband.

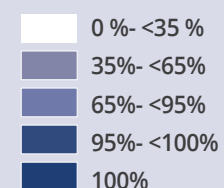
The NBP plan is an integral component of the Rural

Development Policy (RDP) 2021-2025, which seeks to sustain and enhance the population of rural areas. RDP aims to revitalize town centres, reduce commuting times, lower transport emissions, and enhance overall quality of life by supporting the development of a highly efficient Gigabit infrastructure.

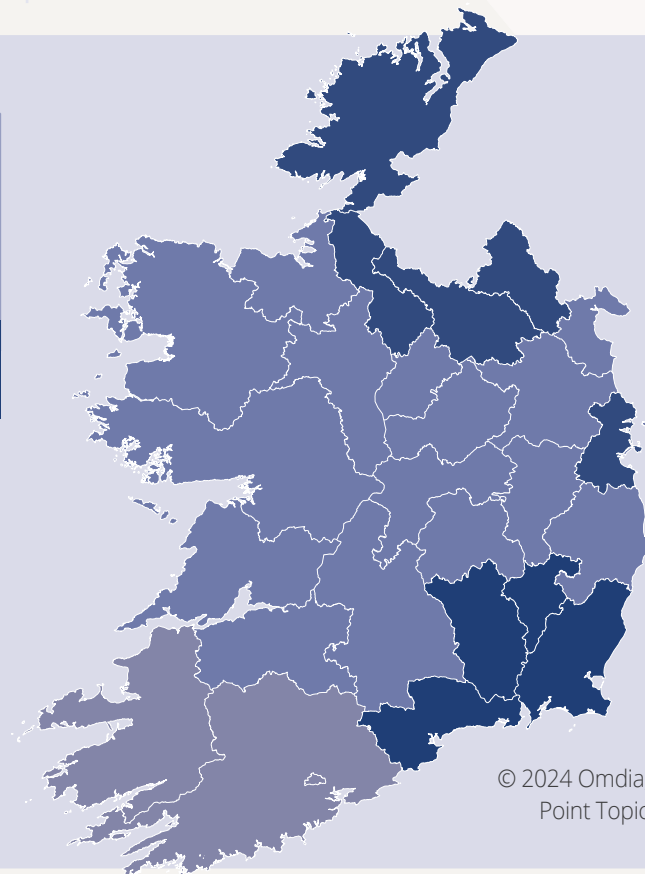
The Broadband Coverage in Europe Report (EU Commission) 2023 indicates County Leitrim ranks as one of the most advanced areas of Ireland for fixed VHCN coverage, however there is still work to be done.

Fixed VHCN (FTTP & DOCSIS 3.1) coverage in Ireland varies across regions, with South East and Dublin having universal and near-universal coverage and South-West Ireland recording the lowest fixed broadband coverage level, at 59.1%.

#### IRELAND: FIXED VHCN COVERAGE (FTTP & DOCSIS 3.1), 2023



Source: Broadband Coverage in Europe 2023, a study by Omdia and Point Topic for the European Commission



© 2024 Omdia, Point Topic

**Figure 2 Fixed VHCN Coverage Ireland 2023**

The Digital 2025: Ireland report by DATAREPORTAL published in March 2025 gives an indication of how digitally connected we are as a nation. It indicates that out of a population of 5.28 million there were 5.22 million individuals using the internet in Ireland at the start of 2025, when online penetration stood at 98.9%. Average internet download speeds were 142.9 Mbps, compared to an average of 43.81 Mbps download speeds via cellular / mobile networks. Both fixed internet connections and cellular internet connection

speeds were seen to have increased significantly in the preceding 12 months (by 39% and 32% respectively).

The report notes that data from GSMA Intelligence shows there were 5.5 million cellular mobile connections in Ireland at the beginning of 2025 (an increase of 117,000 from the same period in 2024), suggesting that some people make use of more than one phone connection e.g. work and personal use. 98.1% of these mobile connections are of broadband quality networks (3G, 4G or 5G).

Ireland was also home to 4.11 million social media user identities in January 2025, equating to 77.8% of the total population. However, it should be noted that this may not reflect the number of individual human users due to multiple platforms and profiles being used. Common platforms used include Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, LinkedIn, Snapchat and YouTube. The Messenger app and X (formerly Twitter) platforms are showing decreasing reach whereas other platforms are increasing their user base.

The Central Statistics Office (CSO) report on Household Digital Consumer Behaviour in 2024 indicates:

- **95%** of internet users use the internet daily.
- **84%** of male and **85%** of female internet users bought online with the most common purchases including clothes, shoes and accessories, readymade food and cosmetics / wellbeing products.
- Internet banking or mobile banking (including PayPal, Revolut, Apple Pay, etc.) and instant messaging were the next most popular internet activities in the first two quarters of 2024, both at **87%**.
- Four in ten (**40%**) internet users in the first two quarters of 2024 made an online appointment or reservation with public authorities or services such as the passport service or a hospital appointment.
- Around **85%** of internet users had used free apps, and of these, over four in ten (**41%**) encountered difficulties when trying to close/delete the app.
- More people were engaging in online learning in 2024. Over one-third (**34%**) did an online course of some form.
- Almost seven in ten (**69%**) internet users used films, series, or sports streaming services such as Netflix, Amazon Prime, Disney+, GAAGO, and Sky Sports.
- Of those aged 75+ who are online **79%** are internet banking, **57%** seek health related information and **38%** use social networking.

Citizens are therefore actively engaging in digital technologies, however there are disparities in the nature and extent of these activities with the potential for those who are not digitally active being left behind

and becoming excluded from community activities and services.

The CSO report on Enterprises 2024 also highlights key features of business engagement with digital technology, including:

- More than **15%** of all enterprises used Artificial Intelligence (AI) in 2024, compared with **51%** of large enterprises (250 or more people employed).
- In 2024, **57%** of large enterprises had broadband with a speed of at least 500 Mbps.
- For small enterprises (between 10 and 49 people employed), **38%** had internet sales, compared with **51%** of medium enterprises (between 50 and 249 people employed), and **54%** of large enterprises.
- Almost one-quarter (**24%**) of enterprises targeted advertising based on users' web content or searches.
- More than one in ten (**12%**) of enterprises had a security incident leading to the temporary unavailability of ICT services in 2024.

Businesses are therefore also increasing their engagement with digital technologies, however there is disparity in the extent of their engagement based on factors such as business scale. This is particularly an issue for small businesses (which represent the backbone of economic activity in Leitrim). A recent survey by LeanBPI indicates **71%** of small business owners in Ireland reported that they struggle to retain talent due to competition from larger companies. As a result, the same proportion report a clear digital skills gap in their sector. When assessing their own knowledge of digital technologies, **46%** of small business owners said they felt out of their depth. Almost half (48%) reported that managing digital transformation is stressful and **43%** admitted they lack the confidence to drive digital change within their organisation. One in four small firm owners said they face pushback from their teams on embracing new technologies, while almost one in five said they are not providing sufficient training for their team on the use of digital technologies. Additional support is therefore essential if a transition towards digital technologies is to be achieved.

## 2.1.2 Socio Economic Characteristics of Leitrim

Socio-economic analysis undertaken to inform the development of the Leitrim Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP) 2023-2029 highlight the following key characteristics:

- In 2022, the population of Leitrim was 35,087 making it the smallest county by **population** in the State. However, the County has seen consistent growth in recent years and recorded a growth rate of 9.5% between 2016-2022 making it the county with the fourth highest growth rate in the State.
  - The **average age** of Leitrim's population in April 2022 was 40.7 years, compared with 39.8 years in April 2016. Nationally, the average age of the population was 38.8, up from 37.4 in April 2016. The number of people aged 65 and over continues to grow with this age group increasing by 22% to 6,573 in Leitrim. The population is therefore ageing, increasing the importance of effective on-line connections but which also present challenges for ensuring older people have the necessary digital skills to be able to engage and have the ability to access healthcare which will allow them to life well at home for longer.
  - According to Census 2022, 84.1% of Leitrim residents live in **rural areas**, whereas 36.3% of people live in rural areas Nationally. The population therefore needs effective digital connections outside main urban centres.
  - The economy of Leitrim was characterised by a shift away from primary economic activities toward the provision of goods and services.
- The results from the 2020 Business Demography highlighted the majority (95.1%) of enterprises in County Leitrim employ less than 10 people. The large percentage of small businesses underlines the importance of SMEs and micro-enterprises to the economic livelihood of County Leitrim. These SMEs and Micro-enterprises however need support to be able to identify and embed new technologies into their processes due to the lack of in-house capacity.
- In 2020, the estimated total income per person for Leitrim was €27,334. Leitrim's total income per person was 1.5% higher than the regional average of €26,912 but 6% lower than the national average of €29,085. However, Leitrim's disposable income per person in 2020 was €20,885, 3% higher than the regional average of €20,248 and only 2% lower than the national average of €21,365. Leitrim therefore has the opportunity to offer a good quality of life for its citizens if the right economic and social opportunities are available.
  - In relation to Education, there is an 81% progression rate from second-level to third-level education. Among those pursuing higher education, STEM fields attract 24% of students, while business studies account for 21%. Notably, 20% of Leitrim's residents hold a third-level qualification, aligning with the national average. However, there is no University / 3rd Level Institute located in the County, Atlantic Technological University (ATU) Sligo is approximately 45 minutes away, and the University of Galway is about a 120-minute drive.
  - Remote work** has become increasingly prevalent in Leitrim. Approximately 28% of the workforce, or 4,100 individuals, work from home at least part of the week, with over 1,000 doing so five days a week
- The LECP identifies a range of needs for effective development in the County. Those relevant to this strategy include:
- Nurturing and diversifying Leitrim's economy and attracting new investment to create opportunities for sustainable employment.
  - Providing suitable supports for the ageing population, addressing deprivation and poverty and ensuring that all communities have access to excellent services and amenities.
  - Continuing to develop Leitrim's education and training ecosystem to help support learning, enterprise and innovation.
  - Addressing climate change and embracing sustainability to preserve and enhance Leitrim's diverse and beautiful natural landscape.

## 2.2 Strategic and policy context

There are a range of International, National and local strategies which set the context and framework for Digital Placemaking.

### 2.2.1 EUROPEAN CONTEXT

At EU level, Digital Placemaking will contribute to the principles of the **EU Green Deal** by supporting the innovation, transition and growth of rural towns and villages towards enhanced digitisation and a lower carbon economy. It will also contribute to the principles of the **Territorial Agenda** by combating imbalance and inequality, creating increased community interaction and cohesion.

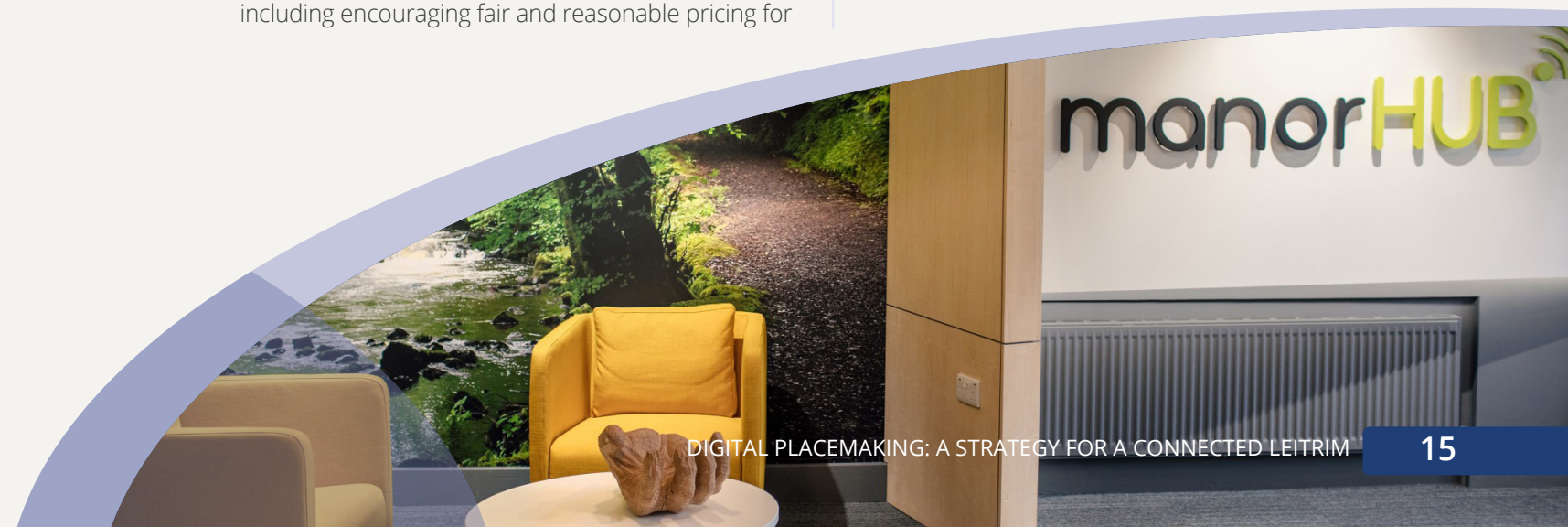
The European Union has established ambitious goals through its **Digital Decade Policy Programme**, aiming for widespread adoption of advanced digital technologies by business and public agencies, enhanced infrastructure for data transmission and storage, and digital literacy with an aim of 80% of the population having basic digital skills, by 2030. Subsequent legislative change through the **EU Gigabit Infrastructure Act (2024)** emphasises the importance placed on digital connection by seeking to ensure a fixed Gigabit network of high capacity (1Gbps) covering all EU households and that all populated areas will have access to 5G mobile connections. That Act seeks to ensure faster, cheaper and simpler roll out of Gigabit networks through encouraging shared use of infrastructure including encouraging fair and reasonable pricing for

access to infrastructure, encouraging collaboration / co-ordination with public sector works contracts in fibre optic cable installation, streamlining of administrative procedures related to network rollout and encouraging high speed ready infrastructure for buildings. The onus is placed on member states to ensure they achieve these legislative requirements across their regions.

However, rural areas, including Leitrim, face unique challenges in achieving these targets due to connectivity deficits, skill gaps, and limited access to digital resources. Digital Placemaking and the associated action plan will therefore provide a focus to encourage and facilitate digital transition and thereby contribute to the creation of more resilient communities which experience increased quality of life.

This work will benefit Leitrim with enhanced connectivity, increased economic performance, enhanced digital skills and increased adoption of technologies which facilitate economic transition to lower carbon and more sustainable communities.

Leitrim for the benefit of all our citizens, businesses and visitors.





## 2.2.2 National Context

At National Level, the Strategy aims to contribute to the objectives of Ireland's **National Planning Framework (Project Ireland 2040)**, **National Development Plan 2021-2030** and the goals of **Our Rural Future: Rural Development Policy 2021-2025** by strengthening rural communities, addressing inequality and decline by supporting digital innovation and connectivity. Leitrim's Digital Strategy will assist in making rural towns, villages and rural communities in Leitrim attractive places to live, work and visit through adoption of digital solutions to economic growth, enhancing community skills in digital technology application and use and delivery of sustainable community activities.

Through supports for local economic development, the Strategy will also support achievement of the goals of the **Economic Recovery Plan 2021** and its ambition to build a sustainable and resilient Irish economy. With its focus on enterprise, the strategy will also support Ireland's **Industry 4.0 Strategy 2020-2025** and **National Smart Specialisation Strategy 2022 – 2027** by increasing awareness of digital technologies, their benefits / opportunities and encouraging their adoption with the aim of boosting innovation, regional growth and green transformation of enterprise.

Digital Placemaking supports the **Enterprise Ireland Strategy 2022-24** by increasing the level of digital adoption by small businesses and entrepreneurs in rural communities, thereby increasing their sustainability and competitiveness in wider markets. In addition, it aligns with the objectives of the **Town Centre First Policy Approach** by recognising the potential and supporting the maximisation of connected working spaces, community facilities and services. This Digital Strategy will seek to promote use of digital technology to improve the quality and accessibility of services, addressing the challenge of inaccessibility and inequality of provision faced by rural towns.

Through a focus on the ongoing transformation of public service delivery, Digital Placemaking supports implementation of **The Connecting Government 2030: A Digital and ICT Strategy for Ireland's Public Service**. Connecting Government sets out an approach to deliver digital government for all, benefitting both society and the broader economy with the aim of creating a trusted, human-driven, intuitive and inclusive-world leading digital government service. The Strategy highlights the Public Service in Ireland must harness digitalisation to drive a step-change in how people, businesses, and policy makers interact, ensuring interoperability across all levels of government and across public services. For individuals, ambitions include providing better access to trusted, high quality digital government services; services that are delivered in an equitable, inclusive and sustainable manner with better service to those who need assistance; secure and transparent reuse of personal data; and opportunities to co-create government services. For businesses, the ambitions include better access to integrated digital government services; reduced administrative overhead; GovTech opportunities; and greater openness and engagement with government. And for policy makers, the ambitions include better use of data to plan and deliver all government services; strengthened capabilities and skills; an ecosystem of common digital building blocks/tools; and stronger governance. The Strategy outlines six priority action areas:

1. A Human-Driven Digital Experience – Understanding our users and their needs is key to delivering better services;
2. Harnessing Data Effectively – Improve public services by implementing structures to deliver more and better re-use of data, respecting privacy and data protection;
3. Government as a Platform – Drive service simplification through an ecosystem of standards, resources and tools including application of the “once-only” principle;
4. Evolving Through Innovation – Challenge ourselves to look afresh at solving difficult problems to build innovative solutions putting our users at the centre;
5. Strengthening Digital Skills – Strengthening and developing new capabilities and skills, which are able to sustain a digital public service culture;
6. Focusing on Governance and Leadership – Put in place governance structures to drive digital transformation across government.

Underpinning these priority action areas are a set of core design principles:

- Digital by Default and Cloud-First – Building towards the targets for 2030 that 90% of applicable services are consumed online and being more proactive and progressive in embracing cloud;
- All-of-Government Approach – Ensuring an integrated and richer experience for individuals and businesses and that digital considerations are embedded in policy processes;
- New Ways of Working – Enabling working environments that empower our people to give of their best, promoting the sharing of ideas, designs and innovations;
- Privacy-Driven and Secure by Design – Design and build systems that are aligned with best practice in security and cyber defence.

Digital Placemaking will seek to contribute to the realisation of these priority action areas embedding their core design principles within its aims and objectives.

Of additional relevance and importance to the Digital Placemaking is **Harnessing Digital: The Digital Ireland Framework** which reflects the twin challenges of digital transformation and decarbonisation transition. Ireland aims to harness the power of digital to help achieve climate change goals, drive balance and inclusivity and enhance productivity.

The Framework outlines the goal to be a digital leader at the heart of European and global digital developments, building on the progress and adaptability demonstrated across society during the pandemic. This will require promotion of the digital agenda effectively and coherently across all areas of Government policy and service delivery, working closely with stakeholders.

The Framework emphasises digital technologies can make the lives of all citizens better through the creation of new job opportunities and new ways of working; greater and more equitable access to personal, social and civic opportunities; and improved accessible government services for everyone. It aims to ensure all groups will be supported and empowered to benefit from digital opportunities including businesses small and large, communities urban and rural, and people young and old; leveraging Ireland's strengths to bridge the digital divide across enterprise and wider society. By driving digital transition and related technologies, it will also support the achievement of climate targets, with green and digital ambitions re-enforcing each other.

The Framework emphasises this means driving a step change in SMEs; showing leadership by advancing digital Government services provision and through strong regulation; providing enabling infrastructure and robust cyber security; and supporting talent and skills at all levels across the general population, workers and enterprise.

The **National Hub Strategy** is in draft and will be released in the coming months, The Digital Strategy for County Leitrim will seek to make a direct contribution to ensuring the usefulness and sustainability of both the BCP and Connected Hubs network across the County of Leitrim in line with proposals in this regard that we anticipate to be in the new Hub Strategy once launched.

From a community perspective, there are a number of National policy objectives which are relevant

to and align with the Digital Placemaking. The Strategies **Adult Literacy for Life and Digital Strategy for Schools** recognise the importance of digital literacy as a key competency and skill. **The Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities Strategy** also emphasises the need for a strong and connected community and voluntary infrastructure including a focus on education and training for those working in the sector.

## 2.2.3 Regional Context

The Digital Strategy will align with and assist in delivery of the aims of the **Northern and Western Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy 2020 - 2032** by developing a smarter rural region and increasing the sustainable regeneration of rural towns and villages. The Strategy will assist in ensuring upskilling and reskilling of communities as well as facilitating communities to become more resilient by embedding global digital trends locally. The Strategy will also encourage adoption of smart connected growth which is eco-friendly.

The Digital Strategy will also complement and add value to delivery of the aims and objectives of the **Northern and Western**

**Regional Programme 2021-27** by contributing to the delivery of a smarter region through innovative and smart economic and community transformation as well as a lower carbon more sustainable region.



## 2.2.4 Local Context

As part of the development of the **Local Economic and Community Plan 2023 - 2029 (LECP)**, Leitrim County Council together with the **Local Community Development Committee (LCDC)**, SPC for Planning, Economic Development and Infrastructure and other key stakeholders developed 6 high-level goals with associated objectives and desired outcomes to assist in guiding the direction of the County over the 2023-2029 period:

1. Leitrim will continue to develop as an inclusive, healthy and equitable county that supports wellbeing and is celebrated as a great place to live. This includes increasing access to initiatives related to health, wellbeing, diversity and inclusion.
2. Leitrim will embrace climate action to increase the sustainability of its communities and unlock the benefits of the green economy. This includes outcomes related to reducing emissions and increasing the proportion of sustainable modes of transport and Council fleet.
3. Leitrim's towns and villages will continue to be revitalised and regenerated as attractive places to live, work and visit.
4. Leitrim will be recognised for its educational attainment, life-long learning and training opportunities. This includes objectives related to increasing the level of digital and IT skills across all ages.
5. Leitrim will strengthen and diversify its innovative economy, create meaningful employment and promote sustainable enterprise. This includes objectives to support businesses across the County to improve and innovate.
6. Leitrim will champion its natural and cultural environment and support the development of the county as a tourism destination in a sustainable and balanced manner.

The Digital Strategy needs to align with and support achievement of these goals by using technology to put people first and ensure their inclusion as well as increasing opportunities for educational attainment and strengthening the community, business and natural environment.

Digital Placemaking also aligns with the goals of Leitrim's **Age Friendly Strategy** (2022-2026) which aim to ensure older people in the community are socially connected and can access relevant, timely and practical information as well as having access to support which will enable them to remain in their own homes. Access to effective and safe digital information and services will assist the achievement of these goals.

The Strategy also needs to complement the implementation of the **County Leitrim Renewable Energy Strategy and Climate Action Plan 2024 - 2029** which aim to encourage and support the transition of Leitrim to a carbon neutral economy, including reducing the climate impacts of public service delivery. The increased use of digital technologies, by its nature, could result in an increase in energy consumption and therefore there is an increasing importance and urgency to effect the transition to more sustainable energy sources. This should include supporting efforts to improve energy efficiency through digital technologies and smart metering, incorporation of wind and solar energy, encouraging the incorporation of renewable heat sources and transport using renewable energies. The Climate Action Plan also highlights objectives to encourage and promote climate action by wider community and business interests through social media / on-line information portals.

**Leitrim County Council's Corporate Plan 2024 - 2029** also embeds these objectives with goals linked to enhancing digital transformation of business, public service delivery and community life through enhanced access and capacity to use digital solutions.





## 3 Current Position

Leitrim County Council considered that, as part of the development of the new Digital Strategy, a co-design process should be followed to involve and empower the local community to guide what should be included in the new Strategy and Action Plan. Strategy Development has therefore been undertaken via a 4-stage process:

- **STAGE 1** – Understanding and identifying the key issues related to digital preparedness and future needs across the county through local consultation, stakeholder engagement.
- **STAGE 2** – Desktop research on the wider strategic context for Digital transformation, including progress against Digital Leitrim 2022-2025.
- **STAGE 3** – Analysis of consultation feedback and strategic context resulting in identification of priorities and actions for inclusion in the new Digital Strategy.
- **STAGE 4** – Council consideration and agreement on the new Digital Strategy.

We are confident that this plan will play a key role in shaping the sustainable growth of County Leitrim for the benefit of all our citizens, businesses and visitors.

### 3.1 PROGRESS MADE THROUGH DIGITAL LEITRIM 2022-2025

During the implementation of the first Leitrim Digital Strategy the following programmes have been progressed:

#### P1 Infrastructure and Connectivity

- The Council have engaged with National Broadband Ireland and other core delivery partners on the roll out of the National Broadband Plan. To date, works to deliver high speed broadband provision have enabled 84% of the County to order / pre-order services. Locations already receiving enhanced connection include Carrick-On-Shannon, Keshcarrigan, Manorhamilton and Bundoran. Roll out across the County is scheduled for completion by 2026.
- Broadband Connection points have been established across the County with access to high-speed broadband connection and IT / audio visual equipment.
- A network of Connected Hubs is also available across the county offering modern IT and office / meeting facilities for local businesses and community organisations.
- Town based public WiFi hotspots were launched and facilitated via WIFI4EU vouchers and other schemes. The three-year contract for WIFI4EU has concluded.

#### LEITRIM DIGITAL ASSETS MAP

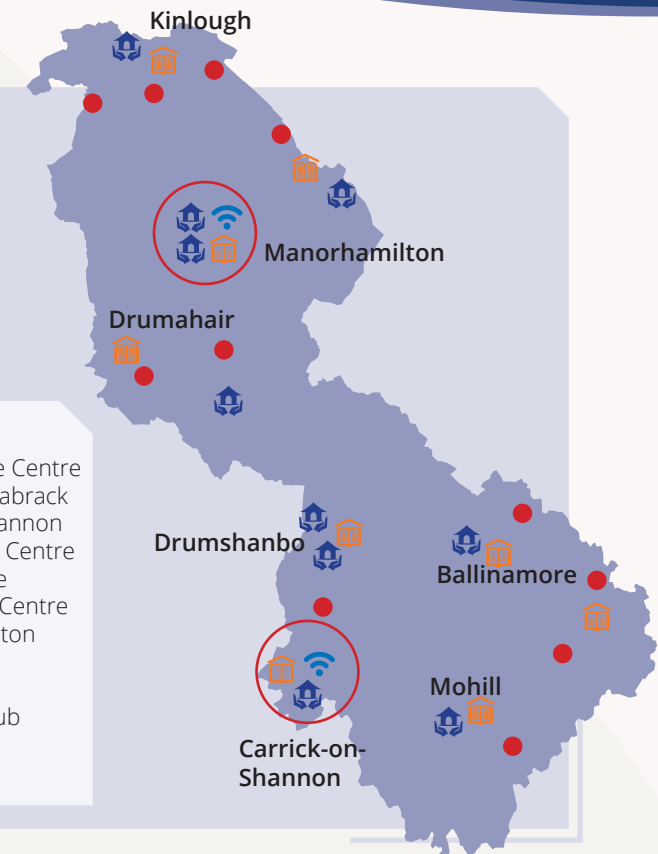
- Metropolitan Area Network (MAN)
- Broadband Connection Point (BCP)
- 📶 Public WiFi Hotspot
- 🏠 Coworking / Digital Hub
- 📖 Public Library

#### BCP's - Connected Communities

- Aghanlish Community Centre
- Askill Community Centre
- Aughavas GAA Park
- Aughawillan GAA Clubrooms
- Drumkeeran Enterprise Units
- Glencar Waterfall visitor point
- Gortletteragh Community Centre
- Killargue Community Centre
- Killenummery Hall
- Aughawillan Community Centre
- The New Ballagh Centre, Rossinver
- Leitrim Gaels Community Facility

#### Connected Hubs

- Drumshanbo Enterprise Centre
- The Food Hub, Carricknabrack
- The Hive, Carrick-on-Shannon
- Drumkeeran Enterprise Centre
- Mohill Enterprise Centre
- Ballinamore Enterprise Centre
- Manorhub, Manorhamilton
- W8, Manorhamilton
- Kinlough Business Hub
- Ballinagleragh Digital Hub



#### P2 Smart Communities

- Digital Skills for adults' courses have been delivered via the Library service & community organisations such as Ballinamore and Manorhamilton Men's Sheds under the Digital Skills for All Programme. Sessions related to Health Literacy were also delivered via the Healthy Leitrim Project as well as Shoulder-to-Shoulder project supporting the men's sheds.
- Digital Literacy programmes have also been delivered in schools using technology & software provided by the Library Service such as Lexia, TTRS, Nessy and Wordshark. Work was commenced with the AIM centre on the development and delivery of VEX robotics workshops. 4 Vex Robotics workshops have been held in 4 of the BCPs with 20 young people involved in each area.
- Our Kids Code workshops have been rolled out in partnership with Trinity College Dublin in locations including Askill BCP, Leitrim Gaels BCP, Killenummery BCO, Killargue BCP, Gortletteragh BCP, Mohill Library, Ballinamore Library, and Manorhamilton Library.
- LOTE4Kids online service was delivered supporting children in their language learning. Each LOTE title can be translated and narrated in English to help with reading and literacy development.
- Mohill Community Group developed a master plan for a solar park project.
- The New Drumahair Library has been developed including a 'Maker Space'.
- FabLab Manorhamilton facilitated a number of sessions with children from Drumlease Primary School in Drumahair as part of the Cruinniú nan Óg 2024 celebrations in June 2024.
- Programmes were developed for delivery of Microsoft Dreamspace for teachers and pupils in local post primary schools. Workshops were held in Gortletteragh BCP and Killargue BCP with 3 schools attending each session. Schools subsequently took part in the Dreamspace Showcase Programme with Microsoft.

- A national Connected Hubs Strategy is under development, and which will offer additional guidance and context for the network in Leitrim.
- Funding was secured from PEACEPLUS for two cross border projects which will include work in County Leitrim, the DS3 project and Stride project. Each project will deliver additional digital skills training and facilities to local communities.

### P3 Digital Economy and Enterprise

- Leitrim LEO undertook a training needs and skills analysis in February 2023.
- Trading Online Voucher Scheme was delivered to enable local business to trade digitally. This scheme has now concluded and has been replaced with a Grow Digital Programme for local SMEs which offers a voucher with up to €5,000.
- Leitrim LEO has delivered a LEAN programme to enable businesses increase performance and competitiveness and a Digital for Business programme which aims to support SMEs to analyse their digital systems and identify opportunities to integrate new solutions to enhance operations and performance.
- Leitrim LEO delivers a Green for Micro programme is to help identify cost savings and improve the green credentials of local business. Support includes 2 days free mentoring and options to secure a voucher worth €2,500 (up to 50% of costs).
- The Creative Heartlands Project delivered over 60 workshops for local creative businesses / micro enterprises reaching over 500 participants and offering hands on training with digital equipment. 1-1 mentoring and business support was offered, helping creative businesses with project development, grant application and business planning. Other activities included skills in film and digitalisation. Digital equipment including film, design and digital fabrication equipment was procured and is now available in the W8 Centre in Manorhamilton.

- 2 videos were prepared and marketing initiatives undertaken to promote the Connected Hubs network and BCPs in the County.

### P4: Digital Transformation

- Leitrim County Council have procured a CRM 'Customer Relationship Management' system which includes Online forms capability and a Customer Web Portal Solution. This initiative will streamline citizen interactions and enhance Public Facing Services allowing Leitrim County Council to directly support the Connecting Government 2030 digital strategy by: "Delivering more integrated, accessible, and user-centric public services through secure digital platforms."
- The Council has developed and released a new Leitrim County Council Website and a new Leitrim County Council Sports website [www.leitrim.ie](http://www.leitrim.ie) and [www.leitrimsports.ie](http://www.leitrimsports.ie) in September 2024.
- The Council has implemented an ePlanning solution designed to streamline and modernise the planning process. This solution addresses the challenges posed by multiple planning-related systems, such as iPlan, APAS, BCMS, Pre-planning, Enforcement, and Mapping, which often suffer from interoperability and reporting issues.
- Leitrim County Council replaced its legacy switchboard software with a Teams Telephony-based solution, which now serves all departments across the organisation. This move eliminated the need for physical desk phones and introduced a more reliable, flexible, and scalable communication platform. The move to a cloud based digital telephony solution enables remote working and mobile access, which are critical for field staff and hybrid working environments.
- The Council procured and implemented an automated signature platform for the secure signing and tracking of documents requiring secure signatures.
- The Council is supporting implementation of Voter.ie to replace the I-Reg application which is

an older site-specific standalone solution installed in each Local Authority. The new Voter.ie version will be a centralised solution supported and updated centrally with the ability to make quicker amendments to citizens voting details, locations etc.

- The Council has enabled its 8 libraries to offer a wide range of online services designed to enhance accessibility and convenience for the community. These services include access to eBooks, audiobooks, magazines, and newspapers which can be accessed via apps on phones or tablets. Additionally, libraries offer online courses that users can take to upskill for free, providing valuable educational opportunities.
- The Open Library initiative also allows libraries to extend their services beyond traditional hours. This initiative enables patrons to access library facilities and resources even when staff are not present, providing greater flexibility and convenience. Libraries equipped with Open Library solutions, such as those in Dromahair and Drumshanbo, offer self-service options, including borrowing and returning books, using computers, and accessing study spaces.

### Wider Programmes ongoing:

In addition to those initiatives developed through the Digital Strategy, there are also a range of other external supports and services which are assisting in digital transformation. These include:

- The AIM centre (Advancing Innovation in Manufacturing) is based in Sligo but is working with businesses across the region providing access to state-of-the-art technology and facilities including robotics, co-bots, virtual and augmented reality laboratories, and collaboration space as well as training. The Centre aims to de-risk change and enables businesses to optimise their manufacturing processes (<https://aimcentre.ie/>)
- The Data2Sustain Digital Hub specialises in advancing digitalisation and data innovation for businesses and public bodies. Services include business / organisation assessment and development of data-driven innovation projects (Services | Data2Sustain).
- Future Cast Innovation Centre Manorhamilton – supporting innovation, education and research & development in the construction and quarrying sector (Future Cast Home Page - Powering Technology in Construction)
- Adult literacy for life programme delivered by MSLETB delivers training in using everyday technology (MSLETB Adult Basic Education & Adult Literacy Programmes)

Each of these initiatives also adds value and complements the work undertaken through Digital Leitrim 2022 - 2025.





## 3.2 Consultation Process Digital Placemaking: A Strategy for a Connected Leitrim

It was agreed the consultation and stakeholder engagement process would comprise of online and public meetings, as follows:

- Public meetings across the county
- Meetings with key stakeholders where appropriate
- An online e-survey

To deliver on this, a series of meetings took place across the county in May and June 25. The purpose of these sessions was to:

- advise residents, community partners,

business owners and wider stakeholders of the opportunities through the development of a new Digital Strategy

- to allow stakeholders to shape the priorities for the new Strategy and Action Plan.

A total of 13 discussion sessions were held with a total of 64 in attendance, as follows:

DATE	LOCATION / FOCUS
27th March	Digital Steering Group
27th May	Local Enterprise Office
27th May	Public meeting Carrick-On-Shannon
27th May	Public meeting Manorhamilton
3rd June	Public Virtual Consultation meeting
5th June	Public meeting Ballinamore
10th June	KPMG
10th June	Education and Training Providers
13th June	Council Economic Development
13th June	SPC Meeting
22nd June	Council Community, Arts and Culture
20th June	Council IT and Corporate Services
2nd July	Council Elected Representatives
10th July	Leitrim PPN

An online e-survey was also circulated widely by Council across existing networks. In total, 76 people completed the e-survey (see annex 1 for detail).

## 3.3 What the Consultation Process Told Us

Through consultation we sought the views of participants on the following areas:

1. Whether the priorities in the current strategy are still relevant and appropriate.
2. If the strategic priorities are no longer relevant / appropriate what should be changed or added.
3. What priority actions should be included in the new Digital Strategy for 2026-2029.
4. Whether additional emerging technological developments should feature in the new action plan such as Artificial Intelligence.

Feedback is consolidated into the following two key areas:

“Education and training in digital skills is an absolute necessity. New tools and software are becoming the norm, but people’s access to the right training to gain the knowledge on how digitisation in all its forms works is imperative.”

### 3.3.1 Stakeholder Consultation Meetings

Consultees recognised the increasing role technology plays in our everyday lives and business activities, however it was also recognised that the pace of change presents challenges for communities in understanding, adopting and using technological opportunities.

Key issues raised during discussions included:

#### Strategic Priorities:

- There was general consensus that the strategic priorities which were embedded in the current strategy are still relevant and appropriate for inclusion in the new Digital Strategy.
- There is a need to reflect a key priority related to resilience / emergency planning. Recent storm damage highlighted the vulnerability of systems related to electricity supply and need for reliable energy supply. Work is required to ensure resilience is built into the system such as designated emergency response centres,

promotion of registers of vulnerable people, availability of satellite communications for key service providers etc. It was suggested this issue should be included under **Priority 1** – Infrastructure and Connectivity.

- **Priority 2** - Smart Communities should be updated to include Smart, Sustainable, Safe and Inclusive Communities.
- **Priority 3** – Digital Economy and Enterprise should also have a focus on supporting businesses to engage and take full advantage of wider regional initiatives.

## ACTION PLAN PRIORITIES:

### Infrastructure and Connectivity: -

- Emergency resilience and effective back up arrangements in the case of power outages is a priority.
- The ongoing roll out of the National Broadband Plan is a priority, ensuring provision to businesses and homes across the County.
- It should be recognised that mobile phone connectivity is fragmented in some areas of the county and this should be addressed to ensure effective phone connection across all areas.
- There are opportunities to expand the use of Connected Hubs and Broadband Connection Points. It was noted that these are used to varying degrees across the network and there is evidence of a reducing engagement with facilities. There is a need to increase engagement and thereby their effectiveness, as well as ensuring they do not become obsolete due to ageing environments and equipment. Opportunities exist for widening service provision to include options such as:
  - Opening hours and access to real time availability data (booking dashboards) across the hub network,
  - Supporting education and skills development e.g. the adoption of AI options,
  - Facilitating greater access to digital health solutions such as private spaces for on-line health consultations and access to health monitoring equipment,
  - Facilities for hybrid e-learning environments such as professional on-line exams e.g. quiet rooms and 360 degree cameras,
  - Ensuring opening hours are appropriate for international working,
  - Promoting facilities to tourism markets etc.

*The successful implementation of digital plans is dependent on bringing key players together in co-ordinated and collaborative ways to create and implement solutions which are added value.*

### Smart Communities: -

- The ongoing need for digital skills training for all sections of the community to ensure no one is left behind in an increasingly technological society e.g. ability to engage in digital transactions. It was noted there are risks around exclusion becoming an indirect consequence of the digitalisation of public services.
- Need for cyber- security awareness for all age brackets and how to discern real versus 'fake' information on-line and when tools such as AI are being engaged with by users.
- Skills development should be offered at a variety of levels from informal grassroots training to de-mystify technology, to schools related programmes (such as Dreamspace, STEM initiatives) and 3rd level educational courses which will facilitate individuals securing jobs in emerging sectors such as cyber security and AI.
- It was noted small education providers have been working on a social enterprise basis to deliver skills training. The development of further education opportunities in Leitrim should consider the sustainability of these organisations.
- There are possible opportunities in developing pilot programmes based on geographical location / town-based approaches which create a buzz of enthusiasm and interest and harness collaboration by key stakeholders to target community, education and business sectors.
- Non- profit organisations are still struggling with issues such as roll out of SharePoint / OneDrive in streamlining of services and processes – there is a need to offer support on development and implementation.
- Communities need to be empowered to rise to the challenge of climate change via green transition and adoption of more sustainable energy forms. It was also noted rather than encouraging the use of technology, which is energy using, there's also a need to highlight the need to reduce / be more efficient in energy use.

- AI has the potential to enable transformation in the delivery of services and programmes within communities, however the understanding of AI technologies and their potential application is currently low.
- There are opportunities for enhanced connectivity with rural transport options via the development of car share apps / models.
- Some people in communities are disengaging with social media due to the nature of content being relayed. This could present a challenge for public and community service providers on how to ensure effective community awareness on key issues and programmes.
- There is a challenge in affordability of internet access and phone connection which may place barriers for communities in the adoption of digital technology.

### Digital Economy and Enterprise: -

- Many businesses have now progressed to having the ability to sell on-line. Business needs have therefore progressed to internal process innovation (how they embed technology in the creation of their products and services) and understanding new / emerging technologies and their opportunities, such as AI.
- Actions should reflect the availability of Grow Digital vouchers and Digital Start Programmes.
- There is a need to deliver practical training for business including micro-accredited courses in technological skills.
- Cyber security is an increasing issue for SMEs – there is a need to ensure a better understanding of key risks and how to keep systems secure.
- There is a need to support businesses in developing options for 'greening' business processes beyond energy efficiency measures.
- The extent of people home working was highlighted during recent storm damage. There is therefore an untapped pool of individuals

who may benefit from increased engagement / connection to the Hubs network. Leitrim could also be promoted as an effective remote working base and the life-style opportunities it provides.

- Need to consider digital transformation of businesses across the range of business sectors represented in the County, including the agri-food industry. This should include review of what the opportunities are within the context of the respective sector, the potential consequences are of non-adoption and how to mobilise transformation. For example, opportunities to manage services on-line directly by the farmer e.g. mart buying, co-operative models for producing / accessing required farm services, life stock management, forestry management and production etc.
- There are opportunities for sectors in Leitrim to become innovation adapters – applying technology to new situations / areas.
- There are possible opportunities to link small businesses and town centres via combined ordering & delivery facilities (e.g. tesco type shop experience across local suppliers).
- Opportunities also exist for the creation of a brand identity for Leitrim enabling local businesses to create links abroad and effectively sell / engage with wider audiences such as diaspora.
- Businesses need to be made aware of the requirements for cyber-security measures in public procurement.
- There are possible opportunities for the development of virtual experiences for the tourism industry, for those living with disability and for diaspora communities. For example, pod casting / live streaming of events. Other opportunities may include outdoor recreation. Currently Leitrim is perceived to be lacking in digital trail / footprint and interaction. Options could include scan apps which enable site users to pay a donation for appreciating a walking trail / environment accessed for recreational purposes.



#### Digital Transformation of Council Services: -

- There is a need and opportunity to consider how public bodies can use digital information more effectively while complying with GDPR legislation.
- There is a need and opportunity to expand the steering group to include members from key sectoral interests e.g. Teagasc, Forestry Service etc.
- Digitalisation of Council service delivery / access should continue to develop. This should include options for emergency resilience co-ordination and information sharing e.g. the future of options such as the Leitrim Alert app and how Council engages / co-ordinates responses with wider agencies such as electricity companies / health care providers.
- It was noted however, that there is still a need to deliver opportunities for in-person services to offset the potential for exclusion and social isolation.
- Council building / asset refurbishment should consider and embed energy efficiency and renewable energy provision.
- Additional opportunities for consideration in infrastructure development include immersive room facilities for access to Council service delivery (e.g. planning application review) and arts / culture activities, smart street furniture, community CCTV.
- There is an ongoing need for cyber-security training and digital skills development for Council staff.
- Consideration should be given to cross border digital links to ensure compatibility of infrastructure, networks and skills.

*"A quarter way through this century, the days of - you'll have to come in and fill out a form for that - shouldn't exist anymore, for anything! Best of luck with your important work."*

*"Consider those who don't have smart phones laptops, iPads, tablets and aren't computer savvy - should be options for those people to do business or complete forms offline."*

## 3.3.2 Public Survey

**Seventy six individuals responded to the online survey. The majority (52) responded as private citizens, with 5 business representatives (offering perspectives as SMEs), 8 community organisation representatives and 8 government / statutory agency representatives also taking part.**

#### Key issues highlighted were:

There is a variety of readiness and engagement in digital innovation activity within both business and community sector organisations currently. While some respondents indicated they are undertaking proactive digital innovation activities regularly / on a sustained basis, others are not active at all or are identifying options but are not yet implementing improvements.

Reasons why businesses and community organisations are not currently involved in digital innovation. Concerns indicated were:

- Concerns about the cost of digital innovation
- Lack of digital skills within the organisation
- Lack of access to specialist knowledge / technical expertise to help develop or deliver digital innovation activities
- Difficulty in identifying digital innovation opportunities
- Don't see the need to innovate / no ambition to digitally innovate
- In addition, community representatives of community-based organisations also identified insufficient time as a barrier.

For those businesses which did wish to digitally innovate, their key areas of interest related to organisational and product / service development with an expressed interest in digital transformation as outlined below:

- Enhancement of the customer experience
- Advanced digitalisation / automation - use of the latest digital tools e.g. automation, AI, data analysis tools etc.
- Development of services / products
- Digitalisation / automation of core operations e.g. cloud accounting, digital marketing, operation management tools etc.
- Enhanced digital skills within organisational staffing.

Community organisations in comparison highlighted:

- Enhancement of the customer experience
- Digitalisation of core operations
- Organisational change
- Eco-innovation and increasing their environmental sustainability
- Advanced digitalisation / automation
- Enhanced digital skills within the organisation
- Product / service development.





There is therefore an interest on behalf of community organisation respondents in transforming how they deliver their services and connect with their service users, with a need to increase their digital capabilities and skills.

Respondents representing government agencies / statutory bodies reflected the organisations they represent are mostly undertaking adhoc, or proactive digital innovations and improvements including enhancement of customer experiences, automation of core operations and organisational change. The highest priorities for future development outlined were ongoing organisational change, enhanced digital skills for staff and enhancement of the customer experience.

All respondents were asked which thematic priorities / pillars should be included in the Digital Strategy for 2026-2029. It was clear from the responses that all the current thematic pillars are appropriate and should be retained, with an additional emphasis on environmental sustainability of communities and businesses.

When asked about the priority issues / areas for inclusion, responses indicated the following order of priority:

1. Cyber-security
2. Artificial intelligence (adoption / development / use)
3. Digital skills / STEM in education and e-health and wellbeing
4. Digital innovation / acceleration in green energy / de-carbonisation of communities and businesses
5. Robotics, automation, digital transformation (industry 4.0)
6. Use and development of social media platforms and digital experiences / virtual reality
7. Digital transactions, crypto currencies.

Respondents were asked about activities which should be included in a new digital strategy. All the suggested activity types were supported with particular emphasis being placed on:

- Education and training in digital skills,
- Development of physical digital network infrastructure
- Increasing access and use of digital hubs and broadband connection points
- Modification of existing community, business and domestic premises to accommodate enhanced digital connectivity
- Development of enhanced cyber security and
- Development of digitally based businesses.

## 3.4 Swot Analysis of the Current Digital Landscape

### STRENGTHS

- Leitrim is accessible to main urban centres with public transport links (including rail service to Dublin and 3 national roads) and is therefore an attractive location for inward investment and remote working.
- The County has an established network of Connected Hubs and Broadband Connection Points across the County offering high speed connections and IT facilities for business and community users.
- Roll out of the National Broadband Plan means 84% of the County is now able to order/ preorder high speed internet connection.
- Public service provision offering enhanced online connectivity for service users.
- Digital Literacy provision during the period of the current action plan has increased awareness, understanding and capabilities in using digital technologies amongst participants.
- Level of disposable income in the County (an average of €24,881 per capita in 2023), and the natural environment in Leitrim offers a quality living environment and place to do business.
- Increasing population offers more opportunity for business creation and sustainability.
- Strong community and voluntary sector in the County which is active in the development and delivery of community activities and services.

### WEAKNESSES

- Rural nature of the County makes ensuring consistent and effective broadband and mobile phone provision difficult.
- Digital divide creates a gap between those who have access to digital infrastructure and digital technologies and those who do not or cannot afford them resulting in inequality of opportunity.
- Recent storm damage has shown the County is vulnerable to power outage, with communities and businesses dependent on the national grid electricity supply.
- No third level / University education facility in the County and limited post-primary education in computer / digital skills at Leaving Certificate level.
- Under-utilisation of Connected Hubs and Broadband Connection Points with the subsequent potential facilities will age and become obsolete without additional investment to meet user demand.
- Scale of need for digital training and intergenerational nature of training requirement outstrips available supply.
- National Broadband Plan digital infrastructure development requires citizens to progress connection to the premises to be able to realise the benefits of high-speed connections.
- Funding of contracts for public WiFi 4 EU have come to an end and now need to be supported locally.
- Large number of young people aged 20-29 leaving the County for opportunities elsewhere.
- Increasing deprivation in some areas places increased demands on public services and supports.



## OPPORTUNITIES

- Increasing interest by both community and business stakeholders in adopting digital technologies into their products and services.
- EU funded projects through the PEACEPLUS programme offer an opportunity to enhance digital skills and access to digital technologies over the next 3 years.
- Opportunity to support skills development through opening of Leitrim College of Further Education by MSLETB.
- Partnership with organisations outside the County (e.g. AIM Centre in Sligo, Maynooth University & ATU, Microsoft Ireland and Trinity) offer an opportunity to enhance training and facilities provision for Leitrim residents, schools at all levels and businesses.
- The launch of the new connected hubs strategy at national level will we expect place increased emphasis on digital facilities and offer a focus for their future development and promotion.
- Opportunities to offer remote / hybrid learning environments which bring third level courses and training options to the County via the Connected Hubs / BCPs.
- Opportunities to create new arts, culture and recreational activities through digital technologies which service both local communities and tourist visitors.
- Opportunity to enhance public realm and key infrastructure through incorporation of digital technologies e.g. smart lighting, smart benches, recreational walkways etc.
- Opportunities to become more active in sustainability and push towards carbon neutrality which could result in economic, social and recreational benefits.
- Opportunities to cluster business and community services for relay to potential new users / customers via digital technology platforms.
- Potential for increased efficiencies and reduced costs through use of digital technologies in business, public services and community service delivery.
- Rural nature of communities makes availability of online services attractive to users.

## THREATS

- Cost of digital services may present a barrier to residents, community and business service users.
- Pace of technological change places increasing burdens on citizens, community organisations and businesses to keep pace with needs and opportunities which could result in people being 'left behind' or businesses becoming uncompetitive.
- Potential threat resulting from cyber security weaknesses in personal, community and business systems.
- Concerns around data privacy (GDPR) limiting the extent to which people feel comfortable to engage with online services.
- Lack of funding / short term nature of funding prevents development and roll out of digital transformation programmes of sufficient scale / nature.
- Outward migration of people from Leitrim to access employment and training opportunities could stifle the progression of technological development and adoption of digital opportunities.
- Ageing population creates challenges for delivering key public, social and economic services and keeping residents active and engaged with emerging digital tools.
- Climate change placing increasing pressure on communities and economic activity, with a resulting need to embrace innovative technologies / approaches to meeting community, business and natural environment needs.
- Global nature of economies facilitated by digital technologies places increased pressure on local business activities and a need to compete on an international scale which may be difficult for the high percentage of SMEs and micro-enterprises.
- Action required to facilitate digital transformation of business and community structures is split across a number of agencies and statutory bodies making co-ordination and collaboration more difficult.
- Potential change to community and business environments and potential job prospects created by emerging technologies such as AI.

# 4 The Vision

## 4.1 OUR VISION

Digital Placemaking reflects a County that is connected, progressive and responsive to the digital world and an increasingly digital future, while remaining true to its cultural heritage and protective of its natural environment.

**Our vision is: Digital Leitrim is a better place to live and do business, where people are connected, included, empowered, safe and valued.**

## 4.2 THEMATIC PILLARS AND OBJECTIVES

**Building on the successes of Digital Leitrim 2022 – 2025 it has been decided to retain, but update, our four thematic pillars to reflect the following priorities and objectives:**

### Pillar 1 Infrastructure, Connectivity and Resilience

The Strategy will continue to encourage, support and advocate for infrastructure improvements across the County. It is considered essential that communities and businesses have access to high-speed broadband connections and mobile phone networks if they are to be able to engage with and maximise the benefits of digital transformation. Roll out of the National Broadband Plan is still ongoing and will continue through 2026, the Strategy therefore reflects the ongoing development of Broadband infrastructure.

It is clear from consultation and needs analysis, that this strategic pillar also needs to incorporate a focus on emergency resilience, with action needed to ensure communities and businesses have access to effective systems to enable connectivity in the case of power failure.

### Pillar 2 Smart, Sustainable, Inclusive and Safe Communities

The Smart Communities Pillar will be expanded in context and focus to incorporate the additional priorities of cyber safety, inclusivity of all ages and abilities and the need to encourage increased sustainability in the way in which communities' access and use services.

The Strategy will therefore progress work to ensure the creation of digitally connected, active and empowered communities, which are inclusive of all community interests. The increased use of digital technologies needs to incorporate the ability to understand technology application and safe use of technologies on offer. This will require skills development for people of all ages including through our network of Broadband Connection Points and our schools. The application of digital technology in the delivery of services also needs to ensure no sections of the community are left behind and become isolated through lack of knowledge, or access to digital equipment. Work undertaken through the strategy will therefore seek to ensure community members are able to access supports at their level of readiness and aligned to their personal and community interests.

### Pillar 3 Digital Economy and Enterprise

The strategy will seek to empower and strengthen the capability of Leitrim business communities to participate in digital transformation. This will include creating opportunities for digital skills enhancement, access to digital hubs and technologies and encouraging mentoring for the identification and implementation of new solutions. Through continued focus on enabling businesses to engage with digital technologies, it is aimed to support the local economy to become more competitive locally and further afield. It is also hoped businesses will be able to innovate how they do business and identify new business opportunities.

### Pillar 4 Digital Transformation in Public Services

The Strategy will continue to place emphasis on the digitalisation and digital innovation of public service delivery. The new Strategy will build on the successes of the 2022 – 2025 Action Plan and will seek to continue the drive towards more effective online service delivery for local citizens, ensure citizens are able to engage in democratic processes and retain control over their own data, identify and mobilise smart technologies for the benefit of citizens and improve the sustainability of public service delivery.



## 4.3 Action Plan to Effect Change

The 4 thematic pillars will be delivered through the actions outlined in the following table.

Action Plan implementation and identification of associated performance indicators will be agreed by Digital Strategy Steering Group as detailed project development plans are formulated. Some of the key indicators to be used will include:

- Digital Skills Awards / Training Completed
- Digital Enterprise Supports accessed
- Digital / Virtual participation in public & community events

- Selected criteria and measures from the Digital Readiness Index
- Numbers of Depts and users engaging with the implementation of Council digital services.

Project completion or extension will be reviewed and assessed on a quarterly basis as Strategy activity is being implemented. The Digital Steering Group will meet on a quarterly basis to review progress and discuss issues and blockages with projects.

Pillar	Action Number	Vision / Aim	Action	Timescale	Metric / KPI / capability	Lead Partner
DIGITAL INFRASTRUCTURE AND CONNECTIVITY						
P1	1.1	Facilitate the provision of high-speed broadband and mobile phone connectivity across County Leitrim	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engage with NBI to facilitate the completion of rollout of NBP in County Leitrim to ensure any challenges to deployment of broadband technologies are dealt with as expeditiously as possible.</li> </ul>	End of 2026	Facilitate meetings as required with engineers, planning and others re licences etc to ensure rollout of NBP fibre to the County.	BBO LCC NBI
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engage collaboratively with telecommunications providers to analyse, increase and improve broadband and mobile phone coverage across the county where possible.</li> </ul>	Ongoing	Liaise with Telecommunications providers to enhance available coverage.	BBO LCC Telecoms providers.
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Deal with queries from members of the public, elected members, businesses in relation to fibre connection to their premises.</li> </ul>	Ongoing 2026-2029	Respond to all enquiries in a timely manner.	BBO
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Act as a point of contact for citizens and business owners with queries on broadband connectivity</li> </ul>	Ongoing 2026-2029	Link with various service providers in order to respond to queries received in relation to connectivity in a timely manner.	Openeir Vodafone SIRO
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Progress Gigabit Hub application for Carrick Business Campus</li> </ul>		Link with Carrick Business Campus with a view to accessing the Gigabit Hub Support from SIRO	BBO SIRO Carrick Business Campus





PILLAR	ACTION NUMBER	VISION / AIM	ACTION	TIMESCALE	METRIC / KPI / CAPABILITY	LEAD PARTNER
DIGITAL INFRASTRUCTURE AND CONNECTIVITY						
P1	1.2	Connected Hubs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support the connected hubs in the County in line with the new Hubs Strategy.</li> <li>Review of current hub facilities, equipment and access arrangements to identify strengths and opportunities for enhancement through funding as it becomes available e.g. development of options for private working space, facilities for on-line professional exams etc.</li> <li>Identification and development of training opportunities and courses for hosting through the Connected Hubs network, including both third level and short industry focused courses.</li> <li>Support and engage with the ongoing development of the functionality of the Connected Hubs platform.</li> <li>Development of a Hubs marketing campaign for local communities, business and visitors.</li> <li>Seek added value role for Connected Hubs with Economic Development, LEO and Tourism to develop sustained use of Hubs in Leitrim.</li> </ul>	Ongoing 2026-2029       2026-2029       2026-2029       2026-2029	Engage with the Hubs Network on the New National Hubs Strategy supports etc on an ongoing basis.   As funding becomes available to support enhancement, ensure awareness of same and work with hub managers and network to identify priorities  Work with LEO and ED to support development of Courses.  Assist WDC in engaging with managers and users to ensure functionality.  Work with existing assets and WDC marketing team.	AECO BBO DRCDG Western Development Commission   AECO BBO Connected Hubs   AECO BBO WDC Connected Hubs  Hub Managers   AECO BBO WDC   AECO BBO LEO



PILLAR	ACTION NUMBER	VISION / AIM	ACTION	TIMESCALE	METRIC / KPI / CAPABILITY	LEAD PARTNER
DIGITAL INFRASTRUCTURE AND CONNECTIVITY						
P1	1.3	Broadband Connection Points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support BCPs to join the Connected Communities website.</li> <li>Support BCPs in the rollout of the equipment upgrade at each location funded by DRCDG.</li> <li>Engage with BCP site managers to review BCP capacity / ability to meet current and projected future community needs, including awareness, access arrangements, facilities and services on offer and make them aware of funding opportunities etc as they arise.</li> <li>Development of a marketing strategy to raise awareness of BCP facilities and ensure use is maximised.</li> <li>Continue development and delivery of a range of thematic programmes with the support of the DRCDG through BCPs on issues of interest to local communities and business stakeholders.</li> <li>Analysis of BCP manager training needs and development of proactive training and skills enhancement programmes to ensure managers stay current with emerging technologies and can offer effective services to BCP users.</li> <li>Engage with the Aim Centre, Our Kids Code and Microsoft Dreamspace to rollout STEM programmes for young people in our communities.</li> </ul>	2026-2029  Ongoing to end of 2026  2027-2028  2026-2028  Ongoing 2026-2029  2026-2027  Ongoing 2026-2029	Support BCP site managers to keep the new website updated.  Liaise with BCP Site Managers on Upgrades.  Develop a survey to ascertain BCP usage and Capacity etc.  Engage with BCP site managers to develop a marketing Strategy.  Continue to share thematic programmes provided nationally by DRCDG.  Develop a survey to ascertain training needs of BCP site Managers.  Engage with STEM Partner listed and BCP site managers to rollout STEM Programmes to young people in rural communities	BBO DRCDG BCPs  BBO Vodafone DRCDG BCPs  BBO BCPs  BBO BCPs  BBO BCPs  BBO DRCDG BCPs  BBO BCPs



PILLAR	ACTION NUMBER	VISION / AIM	ACTION	TIMESCALE	METRIC / KPI / CAPABILITY	LEAD PARTNER
<b>DIGITAL INFRASTRUCTURE AND CONNECTIVITY</b>						
P1	1.4	Emergency Resilience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consider emergency resilience infrastructure and potential needs across the County to meet community and business needs in the case of power outage.</li> <li>Identify a programme of measures which would improve access to back up arrangements and enable people to get connected to key services and back on-line more quickly.</li> <li>Identify a number of Community Hubs from the BCP Network and Connected Hubs network that will act as Emergency Response Hubs, to enable the community to charge phones, access wifi, access food and shower facilities in the event of a power outage like storm Éowyn. Seek funding to set up a number of pilot emergency response hubs.</li> </ul>	2026-2027	Explore options to fund pilot initiatives to support emergency resilience.	AECO BBO
				2026-2027	Explore Options and funding for pilot initiatives	AECO BBO
				2026-2027	Emergency response hub network in place and marketed to potential users.	AECO BBO Connected Hubs
PILLAR	ACTION NUMBER	VISION / AIM	ACTION	TIMESCALE	METRIC / KPI / CAPABILITY	LEAD PARTNER
<b>SMART, SUSTAINABLE, SAFE AND INCLUSIVE COMMUNITIES</b>						
P2	2.1	Skills development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide Citizen digital skills and literacy programmes through formal and informal learning including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cyber security awareness</li> <li>Social media platforms and use</li> <li>Digital transactions</li> <li>Virtual communication platforms</li> <li>Accessing on-line community and public services</li> <li>Use of Digital Fabrication and Media technology</li> <li>Emerging technologies (e.g. AI) – what is it, is it relevant to me and how / when do I engage with it.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>Training options should seek to engage citizens at all age brackets, backgrounds and abilities thereby ensuring no-one is left behind as a result of digital transition.</p>	Ongoing 2026-2029	<p>Engage with BCPs on programme available in relation to STEM in Education including Vex Robotics, Our Kids Code</p> <p>Develop with learnings from Interreg Europe Digital Rural Learning Good Practice Cesis Digital Centre (Latvia) and Interregional learning event in Hungary</p>	BCPs Connected Hubs The Hive/Stride LCC AECO/DS3  Microsoft Aim Centre Trinity College Dublin



PILLAR	ACTION NUMBER	VISION / AIM	ACTION	TIMESCALE	METRIC / KPI / CAPABILITY	LEAD PARTNER
<b>SMART, SUSTAINABLE, SAFE AND INCLUSIVE COMMUNITIES</b>						
P2	2.2	Skills Development through library service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promoting digital literacy through informal learning at a community level, targeting vulnerable excluded groups though one to one digital services.</li> <li>Libraries will support public internet access and enable delivery of digital literacy and ICT training, promote e-learning and address digital divide and support digital inclusion.</li> <li>Media literacy awareness programmes to be delivered to staff within libraries.</li> <li>Offering tech-friendly environments with a makerspace in Dromahair Library Equipped with 3D printers, laser cutter.</li> <li>Programme of events delivered to include coding workshops, schools' visits to makerspace.</li> <li>Flexible layouts in libraries designed for collaboration, creativity, and community engagement and use.</li> <li>Expanding Digital Collections, Libraries have embraced digital content to meet modern demands: E-books and E audiobooks collection allow patrons to borrow digital materials remotely.</li> </ul>	Ongoing 2026-2029		Library teams around the County. BBO Our Kids Code
P2	2.3	Digital Training for Primary and Post Primary Students	<p>STEM training for young people in primary and post primary settings to increase awareness, understanding, capability and confidence in the use of digital technologies. Activities will include delivery of programmes such as Microsoft Dreamspace, Our Kids Code and FabLab access and use.</p> <p>In partnership with MU &amp; ATU engage a number of post primary schools in the STEM Passport for Inclusion programme.</p>	Ongoing 2026-2029	Engage with Secondary Schools around the County to promote the STEM Passport for Inclusion Programme in partnership with MU & ATU	BBO Secondary Schools Maynooth University MU Atlantic Technological University ATU





PILLAR	ACTION NUMBER	VISION / AIM	ACTION	TIMESCALE	METRIC / KPI / CAPABILITY	LEAD PARTNER
<b>SMART, SUSTAINABLE, SAFE AND INCLUSIVE COMMUNITIES</b>						
P2	2.4	Digital transition of community services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Analysis of the current digital status of community services and community organisations across the County.</li> <li>Identification and development of a capacity building programme to enable community organisations to cluster and transition towards offering information, access to and community service management and delivery via digital means.</li> <li>Awareness raising and training programme for community members on the new opportunities provided and how to engage with their local groups via digital options.</li> <li>Linking 2nd level students to community organisations to support the implementation of digital technology options.</li> </ul>	2026-2028	Identify pilot areas for analysis and assessment Identify areas for interventions and align with delivery programmes such as DS3	DS3 LEO AECO
P2	2.5	STRIDE Project Delivery	<p>Be an effective partner to the implementation of the SMART Rural Innovation Driven Empowerment Programme (STRIDE) project.</p> <p>Leitrim County Council will be an active support of the project led by South West College, and wider partnership of Ulster University, Fermanagh and Omagh District Council, Atlantic Technological University Sligo and Leitrim County Enterprise Fund, and Alacrity. STRIDE will operate out of two key innovation hubs—The Workhouse in Enniskillen and The HIVE in Carrick-on-Shannon.</p> <p>The project supports rural communities to use ICT in identifying challenges and developing solutions. The programme aims to empower local citizens by using cutting-edge digital technologies to tackle societal and economic challenges, engaging over 1000 rural citizens and dealing with 80 rural societal challenges, developing 8 transformational projects by its conclusion.</p> <p>LCC will support and raise awareness of the developed STRIDE Empowering Communities Portal: An online platform to support challenge submission, share resources, showcase projects, and connect participants.</p>	2026-2029		ATU The Hive Leitrim County Enterprise Fund



PILLAR	ACTION NUMBER	VISION / AIM	ACTION	TIMESCALE	METRIC / KPI / CAPABILITY	LEAD PARTNER
<b>SMART, SUSTAINABLE, SAFE AND INCLUSIVE COMMUNITIES</b>						
P2	2.6	DS3 Project Delivery.	<p>Leitrim County Council will support the implementation of the DS3 project. The project will engage SMEs, micro businesses, community and voluntary organisations and citizens in a variety of activities which will help close the ICT skills gap in rural communities.</p> <p>The project will be carried out in seven council areas including Leitrim; Sligo; Cavan; Mid Ulster; Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon; Donegal; and Monaghan. Activities will include one-to-one mentoring, workshops, networking events, mobile labs, creation and deployment of a digital platform, and development of three Smart Town Frameworks.</p> <p>The Council will support The Irish Central Border Area Network Ltd who act as the lead partner for the project in conjunction with six other partners and four associate partners.</p>	2026-2028	Lead the delivery of work package 2.1 under the DS3 project  Liaise with all project partners to identify needs for the region and work in partnership to devise programme  Deliver activities for WP1, WP2.2 and WP3 for Leitrim Develop project with learnings from Interreg Europe Digital Rural Interregional Learning Event in Estonia	AECO BBO LEO ICBAN
P2	2.7	Digital Infrastructure and Tools in rural communities	<p>Leitrim County Council will support the delivery of the Digital Rural Interreg Europe Project which aims to strengthen digital infrastructure and capabilities in rural areas across Europe. The initiative seeks to bridge the digital divide between urban and rural regions, promoting inclusive growth and ensuring that rural communities benefit from the digital transformation.</p> <p>As part of this, Leitrim will bring together stakeholders from across Europe for a Conference to share experiences and case studies.</p>	2026-2028	Learn from best practice examples in the Interreg area with a view to adding to what the County currently offers.	AECO BBO LEO Interreg Europe
P2	2.8	Support Community Energy Initiatives	Exploring opportunities to expand activities and programmes that support long-term community sustainability. Continued support for community-led renewable energy initiatives, such as the development of locally owned solar energy projects, remains a priority to ensure inclusive and sustainable growth.		Work with Climate Action team to <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure awareness of schemes and funding</li> <li>Identify priorities.</li> </ul>	AECO

PILLAR	ACTION NUMBER	VISION / AIM	ACTION	TIMESCALE	METRIC / KPI / CAPABILITY	LEAD PARTNER
<b>SMART, SUSTAINABLE, SAFE AND INCLUSIVE COMMUNITIES</b>						
P2	2.9	e-health	Advocate for Leitrim to be considered for pilot of e-health initiatives as a case study for meeting health needs of rural communities and their populations. To include, for example, <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establishing links with health providers such as HSE and CAWT</li> <li>Reviewing the potential for Connected Hubs / BCPs to act as local locations for e-health delivery</li> <li>Development and implementation of a pilot e-health initiative.</li> </ul>	2027-2028	Work collaboratively to identify opportunities	BBO AECO LEO
PILLAR	ACTION NUMBER	VISION / AIM	ACTION	TIMESCALE	METRIC / KPI / CAPABILITY	LEAD PARTNER
<b>DIGITAL ECONOMY AND ENTERPRISE</b>						
P3	3.1	Grow Digital and Digital for Business programmes.	Support the ongoing implementation of the Grow Digital Voucher scheme and Digital for Business programme for SMEs through LEO Leitrim to enable analysis of digital systems, identification of opportunities, integrate and optimise new solutions and provide guidance on implementation.	Each year 2026-2029	8 vouchers	LEO Leitrim EI LEO Centre of Excellence
P3	3.2	Digital Skills for Business	Identify and deliver appropriate digital skills and literacy programmes for business through formal and informal learning including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cyber security awareness</li> <li>Social media platforms and use</li> <li>Digital transactions</li> <li>Virtual communication platforms</li> <li>Accessing on-line public services</li> <li>Emerging technologies (e.g. AI) – what is it, is it relevant to me and how / when do I engage with it, how can I adapt and adopt it in my business activities.</li> <li>Clustering via technology to increase business reach and impacts.</li> </ul>	Each year 2026-2029	8 programmes  Develop with learnings from Interreg Europe Digital Rural Interregional Learning Event in Crete and Good Practice <i>Vasi Green Basket</i> (Hungary)	LEO Leitrim EI LEO Centre of Excellence.

PILLAR	ACTION NUMBER	VISION / AIM	ACTION	TIMESCALE	METRIC / KPI / CAPABILITY	LEAD PARTNER
<b>DIGITAL ECONOMY AND ENTERPRISE</b>						
P3	3.3	Greening Business	Support the ongoing implementation of the Energy Efficiency Grant and Green for Business programme for SMEs through LEO Leitrim to enable SMEs to assess their environmental impact, identify opportunities for energy savings and resource efficiency, and implement tailored solutions that contribute to long-term sustainability with expert guidance.	Annually 2026 -2029	8 Green Programmes	LEO Leitrim EI LEO Centre of Excellence.
PILLAR	ACTION NUMBER	VISION / AIM	ACTION	TIMESCALE	METRIC / KPI / CAPABILITY	LEAD PARTNER
<b>DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION OF PUBLIC SERVICES</b>						
P4	4.1	CRM System implementation	CRM 'Customer Relationship Management' system implementation and optimisation to assist in ongoing streamlining of customer interactions and case management. This will also include the development of a customer web portal. This portal will be used by citizens to avail of council services online. For example, this will include 'Report It' forms, application forms, complaint forms and grant application forms.	First release of online forms November 2025 To continue 2026 - 2029	Development of web Portal for customers.  Develop with learnings from Interreg Europe Digital Rural Interregional Learning Event in Estonia	IT Dept LCC
P4	4.2	ePlanning	Implementation of the ePlanning solution designed to streamline and modernise the planning process across local authorities. An ePlanning Kiosk has been installed for citizens to access the ePlanning application in Aras and Chontae, Carrick on Shannon, Co Leitrim and will continue to be implemented.	In place and implemented.	1. Kiosk Usage Rate. 2. Online planning Application Submissions v in person submissions. 3. Uptime - percentage of time the ePlanning Kiosk and application are operational and accessible. 4. User satisfaction score - Feedback from citizens using the kiosk and application.	LCC



PILLAR	ACTION NUMBER	VISION / AIM	ACTION	TIMESCALE	METRIC / KPI / CAPABILITY	LEAD PARTNER
DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION OF PUBLIC SERVICES						
P4	4.3	Network Development	New SD WAN solution to be implemented later this year, Q4. The SD-WAN (Software-Defined Wide Area Network) solution will offer a cutting-edge approach to managing and optimizing wide area networks, replacing the existing MPLS (Multi-Protocol Layered Switching) WAN solution. The SD-WAN solution will offer a more cost-effective and efficient way to manage WANs, providing secure and improved connections across multiple locations with better reliability and scalability. The council has initiated a pilot project encompassing two sites, with plans to roll out the solution to all 18 sites ensuring secure access to all council and corporate services for staff. The application will enhance performance and increase agility, optimizing user experience and efficiency for software-as-a-service (SaaS) and public-cloud applications.	Q4 2025 into 2026	1. Improved Network uptime across Sites. 2. Improved Application performance bringing about enhanced user experience and agility. 3. Cost Reductions per site. 4. Post deployment assessment of the effectiveness of the SD WAN's improved built in security features.	IT Dept LCC
P4	4.4	Digital skills for staff	Development of a proactive approach and programme to increasing the digital skills awareness, capability and confidence of Council staff. To include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cyber security awareness</li> <li>Social media platforms and use</li> <li>Digital transactions</li> <li>Virtual communication platforms</li> <li>Development and delivery of on-line public services</li> <li>Emerging technologies (e.g. AI) – what is it, is it relevant to me and how / when do I engage with it, how can I adapt and adopt it in my public service activities.</li> </ul>	Ongoing 2026-2029	1. Cyber Security Awareness Completion Rate 2. Digital Confidence Index 3. Online Service Delivery Participation 4. Social Media Platform Engagement IT	IT Dept, LCC
P4	4.5	On-line presence	Undertake a review of the on-line presence in relation to Council services, cultural, heritage and recreational information and seek to consolidate / update where necessary and appropriate accommodating new technologies where it adds value and upgrades the visitor experience. This will include offering Citizens the ability to pay for services online rather than having to visit council offices.	2026-2029	Review of Leitrim County Council online presence.  Online payment system,	IT Dept LCC

PILLAR	ACTION NUMBER	VISION / AIM	ACTION	TIMESCALE	METRIC / KPI / CAPABILITY	LEAD PARTNER
DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION OF PUBLIC SERVICES						
P4	4.6	Open Library	Expansion of the Open Library initiative with additional digital collections of E-books and E audiobooks. The initiative - branded locally as My Open Library - represents a transformative step in how Leitrim County Council delivers library services. By extending access beyond traditional staffed hours, this initiative empowers citizens to engage with library resources on their own schedule, fostering a more inclusive, flexible, and digitally connected community. Open Library allows registered users to access library facilities early in the morning, late in the evening, and on weekends, even when staff are not present. This is especially valuable in rural areas like Dromahair, where the service has been successfully rolled out. Users can: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Borrow and return books using self-service kiosks</li> <li>Access Wi-Fi and public PCs</li> <li>Print, scan, and photocopy documents</li> <li>Use quiet spaces for reading, study, or remote work</li> </ul>	Completed in the new Dromahair Library, work in progress for Drumshanbo Library  2026-2029	Open Library will be operational in Dromahair and Drumshanbo Libraries by the end of October 2025	Library LCC
P4	4.7	Sensory Rooms	The <b>Sensory Room at Mohill Library</b> is a cornerstone of Leitrim County Council's commitment to inclusive, accessible, and community-focused library services. Developed as part of the <b>Sense-Ability initiative</b> , this space is designed to support individuals—particularly children and adults who are neurodiverse, including those with autism, ADHD, dyslexia, or intellectual disabilities—by offering a calm, engaging, and therapeutic environment.	In place.  Ongoing 2026-2029	Ongoing awareness promotion that this facility is available.	Library LCC
P4	4.8	Emergencies connectivity – Starlink Connectivity	In a county as rural and geographically dispersed as Leitrim, maintaining reliable communications during emergencies is critical. The deployment of Starlink satellite internet devices by Leitrim County Council would increase resilience, ensuring that emergency services can remain connected when traditional infrastructure fails.  This initiative is being considered in direct response to recent local emergencies, including the twister in Leitrim Village and the widespread power and connectivity outages caused by Storm Eowyn. These events exposed vulnerabilities in terrestrial networks and highlighted the urgent need for a robust, independent communications solution.  Starlink provides high-speed, low-latency broadband via satellite, independent of ground-based infrastructure making it ideal for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Remote or cut-off areas where mobile coverage is unreliable</li> <li>Disaster zones where fibre and power lines are down</li> <li>Mobile command units and emergency vehicles.</li> </ul>	Ongoing 2026-2029	Connectivity for emergency services for communication during an event in place. Reduction in time to establish a communications hub if required.	IT Dept LCC

## 5 Our Implementation Plan

### 5.1 HOW SUPPORTS WILL BE IMPLEMENTED

To achieve the Vision for Digital Placemaking we will:

- Develop operational action plans under key priorities, ensuring Council run facilities and staff resources are targeted towards realising the identified priorities.
- Seek to form enhanced connections and collaboration between Council, communities, businesses and wider agencies, thereby maximising the impacts of our work. This will include:
  - Considering the membership of the Digital Steering Group with a view to broadening its reach and impacts.
  - Working with key stakeholders and agencies in the development and delivery of programmes, such as Leitrim Enterprise Office.
  - Engaging Council IT department in the ongoing development and implementation of on-line / digital public services.
- Endeavour to meet community and business needs and add value to other programmes and support services, rather than duplicating existing provision.
- Harness business and community support in conjunction with delivery partners and key stakeholders through briefing sessions and information dissemination through existing channels including local networks, social media, official websites and other resources where appropriate.
- Retain flexibility in our approach so that emerging public service, community and business needs / priorities can be addressed through the development and adoption of digital solutions and emerging technologies.
- Maintain a focus on evaluating the impact of our work through the Digital Strategy and associated Action Plan ensuring it delivers effectively for our citizens, communities and businesses.
- Undertake a mid-term review at the end of 2027 to evaluate our progress and capture any new / emerging priorities and opportunities.

### 5.2 COUNCIL SERVICE DELIVERY PRIORITIES

The Council recognises that public services are under increasing pressure from increasing community need, changing demographics and social patterns and increased pressure on budgets available. The Council will therefore seek to work more effectively in partnership with the local community, the community and voluntary sector and the business community in meeting these challenges.

In the delivery of community development activity, the Council will strive to better meet the community needs captured during this review to focus its priorities on:

- Leading networking / co-ordination & partnership development in local communities to create digitally active, engaged and resilient communities.
- Providing access to mentoring / training for citizens, community organisations and business organisations across our County.
- Reviewing the current provision of council facilities and services across to ensure that they:
  - are fit for purpose and meet current and projected digital needs
  - ensure services which are equitable, inclusive and sustainable
  - ensure services respect and protect data security requirements
  - are cost effective and resource efficient
  - encourage and facilitate greater openness and engagement with government.
- Ensuring the skills development and capacity of Council staff to engage with, deploy and develop digital technologies in the service areas within which they work.
- Maintaining an inquisitive and future focused perspective on digital technology opportunities and adoption in public service delivery.

## Annex 1 Priority Actions Aligned to Digital Leitrim 2022- 2025

The following key actions were outlined against each of the four strategic pillars in Digital Leitrim 2022 – 2025:

### P1. Infrastructure & Connectivity

- NBP rollout / Telecoms infrastructure / Services
- Broadband Connection Points (BCPs) & WiFi4EU / Public WiFi hotspots and investment in IoT
- Digital Hubs investment in digital facilities and connectivity

### P2. Smart Communities

- Digital Skills & Literacy programmes targeting all sectors of the community.
- Citizen Engagement & Awareness of digital – Libraries / BCPs / Schools / other community touch points.
- Smart Initiatives & Data – Creating a Smart Leitrim through initiatives that are collaborative, technology led and address local need and opportunity.

### P3. Digital Economy & Enterprise

- Digital Skills for Business – engagement with business by type and sectors to identify digital skills gaps and perform a training needs analysis.
- E-commerce & Digital Marketing – Online Trading Vouchers, social media and digital

marketing support, networks of knowledge / know-how.

- Tech Clusters & Entrepreneurs – services & supports to embed and enhance the digital ecosystem in Leitrim – replicating the success of the leaders.
- Digital Hubs & Remote Working – ensuring Leitrim towns and villages are ready to respond to the need for space, service, support and connectivity.
- Digital Discovery in key sectors – making digital a key development function in emerging and growing sectors including Tourism, Renewable Energy, AgriFood etc.

### P4. Digital Transformation (Public Service)

- Institutional leadership in digitalisation and e-service delivery
- Internal IT systems integration and cloud based – training for staff
- Development of single portal for engagement with citizens

These priorities were represented in the Strategy in the following infographic:



*These strategic priorities and their associated indicative actions form the basis and starting point for the Strategy for 2026 - 2029.*



# Digital Placemaking:

## A Strategy for a Connected Leitrim



Comhairle Chontae Liatroma  
Leitrim County Council