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Report to: Business Innovation and Growth Panel

Date: 7 September 2017

Subject: Digital (*for information only*)

1 Purpose

1.1 To update the BIG Panel on work to develop the digital agenda.

2 Policy development

Digital Plan

2.1 BIG Panel will be aware from their previous meeting in June that work is taking place to refresh the Strategic Economic Plan, focusing instead around a Local Inclusive Industrial Strategy (item 7) with LEP Board discussing this at their next meeting in September.

2.2 Therefore work underway to develop a Digital 'Plan' for the Leeds City Region will be looked at against this wider context but will need to include the breadth of digital: digital infrastructure; digital inclusion; digital skills (being mindful of the existing Employment and Skills Plan); digital opportunities for non-digital businesses; and the digital sector.

Northern Cultural Fund

2.3 As referenced in the Innovation paper (3.2.3), in August Government announced a £15m Northern Cultural Regeneration Fund to boost the regions tech, creative and cultural industries (capital funding). One project per LEP area can be submitted so to ensure an open and transparent process, WYCA will be issuing an open call for proposals for this. This open call process will also seek wider projects which may benefit from any future funding the organisation may secure (future Growth Deal, post ESIF funding etc).

3 Digital delivery

Digital Enterprise Programme

3.1 The Digital Enterprise programme was formally launched in early February 2017. Led by Leeds City Council on behalf of a number of local authority partners including WYCA, the LEP has invested £750k of match funding.

- 3.2 The Digital Growth Voucher scheme received a huge response from businesses in the first phase, which ran from February to March. Approximately 150 voucher applications were expected, with the actual number of applications coming in at 480 (in 7 weeks.)
- 3.3 A mix of technologies were included in phase 1, ranging from hardware upgrades to website and digital connectivity projects, with many projects including a range of solutions (bundled projects).
- 3.4 The level of demand resulted in a temporary suspension of the scheme (at the end of March) to help manage the backlog. The second phase will now launch in September, with a third phase following in May 2018. Projects are being sought where applicants can demonstrate significant digital transformation for the business as well as economic impact.
- 3.5 The Digital Knowledge Exchange is a key component of the overall programme and will offer SMEs access to knowledge, expertise and advice on deploying digital solutions. The Digital Knowledge Exchange launched in July with keynote speaker Andrew Wright.

4 Recommendations

- 4.1 That the update on work to develop the digital agenda be noted.