Report to:	Inclusive Growth and Public Policy Panel
Date:	1 March 2019
Subject:	**Digital Inclusion**
Director(s):	Alan Reiss, Director of Policy, Strategy and Communications
Author(s):	Sarah Bowes and Britta Berger-Voigt

1.   Purpose of this report

1.1   To provide the Panel with an update on work to develop the Digital Inclusion Workstream and to give the Panel the opportunity to provide a steer on the direction of travel.

2.   Information

2.1   Digital inclusion is an essential element of Inclusive Growth because it is about ensuring everyone is able to access and benefit from digital technologies and digital opportunities in modern society. Individuals and communities without digital capabilities can suffer exclusion because, for example, they are required to access an increasing range of public services and information including health care and benefit payments online.

2.2   Digital Inclusion is a core strand of the new Leeds City Region Digital Framework which aims to transform the lives of citizens and businesses across the City Region by opening up opportunities through digital tech. The Digital Framework was adopted by the Combined Authority in December 2018 after an extensive consultation showed that 95% of respondents strongly agreed with the framework's inclusive ambition around 'digital skills for all'.

2.3   The Panel therefore agreed in December to explore a range of delivery options to reduce digital exclusion in the Leeds City Region.

2.4   The Panel recognised that there are already existing digital inclusion capacity building activities in place across the region, although approaches and delivery capacity varies between districts. Much of this activity is not delivered through formal classes and courses but instead through bespoke exploration of people's individual interests and needs, and by carefully matching of content and services online which can meet those needs and stimulate those

interests. A better understanding of what activities are currently being delivered in this way will allow any future interventions to complement rather than duplicate these, and to build on and disseminate local best practice.

2.5   For example, Leeds City Council, in partnership with the Good Things Foundation, have implemented a successful model of building capacity and upskilling a wide range of grassroots organisations to reduce digital exclusion in local communities. This activity is managed by a small core team and enables organisations within the communities to provide targeted digital support. The team has been acknowledged nationally as best practice. This "100% Digital Leeds" movement also offers communities new technologies and innovative solutions, including tablet lending and digital champions. In terms of specific activities:

- As a practical result, Leeds City Council has partnered with wireless broadband provider 6G to reduce digital exclusion in Kirkstall and Armley by offering their services to 160 flats. Further outcomes of this partnership include financial savings, reduced isolation, better employment prospects and improved health and wellbeing.
- The Good Things Foundation is running a three-year programme - Widening Digital Participation - funded by NHS Digital. Widening Digital Participation aims to reduce digital exclusion in the UK, and ensure people have the skills they need to access relevant health information and health services online.

2.6   Since the last Panel meeting, the following work is progressing to develop a Leeds City Region approach to driving inclusive growth through digital inclusion, including:

- High level mapping of current digital inclusion activities that are being delivered by district partners (and others). This will be undertaken by local authority partners via the Panel support group.
- Development of a consultancy brief to identify what practical solutions could best further digital inclusion in the region. Potential delivery opportunities (and costed proposals) are sought where a regional approach could add value.

2.7   Examples of possible interventions which the consultancy brief could include (subject to securing funding):

- Training and support provided to a core group across the City Region to upskill and promote digital inclusion in grassroots organisations - working through existing organisations and community groups to raise the capacity and capability of those to support local communities around digital.
- The rolling out of services such as tablet lending schemes, free Wi-Fi pilots, and targeted support workshops.
- The provision of free Wi-Fi in community areas, and schemes for accessing appropriate devices.
- Exploring the role of libraries and other community spaces and how these can be re-purposed in order to reduce isolation, create meeting places and

digital training opportunities. Targeting people to use the space through people they trust and can relate to.

2.8 In addition, Panel members could also consider supporting establishing a working group to share best practice and learning across districts. This would have resource implications.

2.9 The consultancy brief will be out for tender in March, with a view to submitted proposals for delivery options by May. In the meantime, local authorities via the Panel support group will begin the process of mapping local grassroots organisations that are currently supporting residents around digital inclusion.

3. Financial Implications

3.1 £25k has been allocated for the consultancy brief. Further funding for delivery is currently being identified.

4. Legal Implications

4.1 There are no legal implications directly arising from this report.

5. Staffing Implications

5.1 There are no immediate staffing implications.

6. External Consultees

6.1 Consultants would work within the remits outlined above.

7. Recommendations

7.1 That the Panel discusses the opportunities around digital inclusion activity and provide a steer on the suggested direction of travel.

8. Background Documents

8.1 None

9. Appendices

9.1 Digital Framework