
Report to: Leeds City Region Enterprise Partnership Board (LEP Board)

Date: 14 July 2020

Subject: **Digital Board**

Director: Alan Reiss, Director, Policy Strategy and Communications

Author(s): Sarah Bowes

1. Purpose of this report

- 1.1 To provide Board members with an update of the work of the Leeds City Region Digital Board and seek feedback on proposed changes to increase the effectiveness of the Board.

2. Information

- 2.1 The Leeds City Region Digital Board was established in June 2019 to provide oversight of activities under the Digital Framework, bringing in the experience and expertise of members to help shape and advise on activity. The Board has no decision-making powers but is chaired by the Chief Executive of Bradford Council includes members of the LEP Board and relevant panels, who provide the conduit through to formal advice and decision making.
- 2.2 A light touch review was undertaken in January 2020 to ensure the Board remains fit for purpose. To inform the review, discussions took place with four Board members, five LEP/Combined Authority officers, and the Chair of the Board. The review also took account of ad hoc/informal feedback received over the last six months.
- 2.3 Overall the consensus from all parties was that there continues to be a need for a Digital Board to bring together the different strands of activity and provide external and expert check and challenge. However, there are lessons learnt from the first six months of the Board's existence and recommendations which can strengthen the Board (and the digital agenda) moving forwards.
- Undertake a review of membership to ensure a manageable but relevant and representative group of experts. This review should include strengthened LEP Board and Panel membership, in line with ongoing LEP Board and Panel recruitment.
 - Reinforce the status of the Digital Board by clarifying that it is a working group of the LEP/CA and is the key route for advice on all digital matters;

utilise the expertise and resources of members by establishing task and finish groups when appropriate; and build links with the activity of all five advisory Panels.

- A forward plan for the Digital Board should be developed to ensure the right input at the right time, revisiting Digital Framework objectives at regular intervals.
- Focus each meeting on one or two thematic areas and ensure discussions are interactive and two way, ensuring next steps are fed back.
- Utilise Board members for the Digital Heartland campaign and ensure they are actively participating in delivery (where appropriate).
- Invite experts in on topics to stimulate discussion and steer activity – e.g. Cybersecurity.
- Explore how to make better connections with relevant local authority colleagues.

2.4 This paper seeks a steer from LEP Board on the first two recommendations: strengthening membership and reinforcing the status of the Board.

Strengthening membership

2.5 The review set out the need to improve representation on the Board and this will be done in consultation with existing Panels, local authority colleagues and Yorkshire Universities.

2.6 The Board currently includes representation from Business, Innovation and Growth Panel (Andrew Wright), Employment and Skills Panel (Rashik Parmar and Mark Cowgill). Further connections need to be made with private sector members of the Inclusive Growth, Place and Green Economy Panels.

2.7 Following the West Yorkshire devolution agreement to establish a Local Digital Skills Partnership (LDSP), discussions have taken place to determine the relationship between the Board and the new LDSP.

2.8 LDSPs were established by DCMS in 2019 to bring together cross-sector partners to design, develop, and coordinate the delivery of innovative digital skills programmes, tackle digital exclusion, share best practice, and raise awareness of digital skills regionally.

2.9 The LDSP will focus entirely on digital skills and therefore, given its singular focus, it is appropriate to establish the LDSP separately to the Digital Board with membership focused on the digital skills agenda only. It is important however that connections are made to the Digital Board and ESP. To that end, it is proposed that Mark Cowgill and Liz Needleman (ESP) are invited to sit on the LDSP, with Mark providing linkages between the ESP, LDSP and Digital Board. Connections also need to be made into the CA as this is part of the devolution agreement.

Status of the Board

- 2.10 The review set out the need to strengthen the Board's role in all digital matters across the City Region. The City Region's digital ambitions are firmly set out in the Digital Framework, emerging Strategic Economic Framework and Local Industrial Strategy, and devolution agreement.
- 2.11 Given the importance of digital, particularly in the context of Covid-19 recovery, the Digital Board has recommended a number of actions to provide strengthened accountability and influence over all digital matters:
- LEP Board to recognise the Digital Board as a formal working group of the Combined Authority with the associated responsibilities
 - Reports led by Board members on digital activities to be brought to LEP Board meeting to demonstrate outcomes and impact.
 - An annual review of the Digital Board to take place to consider whether the Board remains fit for purpose and is maintaining its level of influence over the digital agenda in Leeds City Region.
 - Increased visibility of the Digital Board in the form of a web presence and associated comms and marketing activity, subject to resources.
- 2.12 This is particularly timely as the Digital Board now has 3 sub-groups beneath it: the LDSP; the Collaborative Skills Partnership; and the Made Smarter Board (Chaired by Andrew Wright).
- 2.13 The Digital Board is currently considering the opportunities post Covid-19 on the aspirations within Digital Framework. From this a forward plan will be developed for the next 12 months to maximise opportunities.

3. Clean Growth Implications

- 3.1 Digital technologies have a huge potential role in achieving the City Region's clean growth aspirations.

4. Financial Implications

- 4.1 The Digital Board has been established with existing resources, overseeing existing activity whilst helping to inform future priorities.
- 4.2 The LDSP however does have a funded post attached to it. This post will help to coordinate the Partnership, supporting the work of the Digital Board. This post will also be responsible for developing the relationship between the LDSP, Government and the national Digital Skills Partnership.

5. Legal Implications

- 5.1 There are no legal implications associated with this post

6. Staffing Implications

- 6.1 The new LDSP post will be fully funded for one year as part of the devolution agreement.

7. External Consultees

- 7.1 Leeds City Region Digital Board

8. Recommendations

- 8.1 LEP Board support the proposed LDSP integration with the Digital Board and provide recommendations for strengthened membership, including endorsing better connectivity with the ESP.
- 8.2 LEP Board provide a steer on the Digital Board's recommendations to enhance the status of the Digital Board.
- 8.3 LEP Board to provide support for greater alignment between the Digital Board and the Inclusive Growth Panel, Place Panel and Green Economy Panel.

9. Background Documents

[Digital Framework \(summary\)](#)

10. Appendices

Background slides on integrating the LDSP with the Digital Board.