
Report to: Business, Innovation and Growth Panel

Date: 25 February 2021

Subject: **West Yorkshire Innovation Network and Festival**

Director: Alan Reiss, Director Policy Strategy and Communications

Author: Sarah Bowes, Policy Manager, Innovation and Digital

1. Purpose of this report

- 1.1 To provide Panel members with information on the West Yorkshire Innovation Network and the inaugural West Yorkshire Innovation Festival.

2. Information

West Yorkshire Innovation Network

- 2.1 The origins of the West Yorkshire Innovation Network were established in 2017 through an MoU between Leeds City Region LEP and Innovate UK. The MoU signalled the intent and commitment of both parties to joining up and deepening the impact of support across the City Region to increase innovation rates. The Panel was key to making this happen.

- 2.2 The West Yorkshire devolution deal built on this collaboration and took the ambition to the next level. Signed in March 2020, it set out the following:

“The West Yorkshire Combined Authority and Government will establish the West Yorkshire Innovation network through the Connecting Innovation programme. This network will provide a dual-hub for the community of innovative entrepreneurs, startups and SMEs in the West Yorkshire ecosystem. This dual-hub will be anchored through a physical presence at the NEXUS Innovation centre (University of Leeds) and the 3M Buckley Innovation Centre (University of Huddersfield) initially, with further regional opportunities to be explored in the future. This network will bring together business support services from the Growth Hub, local Universities and the Innovate UK ‘family’ (including Knowledge Transfer Network, Enterprise Europe Network and Catapult network). Activities will be supported through regular events in order to raise aspirations and improve the chances of success for our businesses competing for UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) funding”.

- 2.3 The WYIN has been operating for 9 months and has developed a multi-layer approach to the network. This includes the following:
- The Strategic group – involving key players from organisations across the innovation ecosystem to provide strategic direction and steer collective activities.
 - The Advisor group – involving organisations and individuals from across the business support landscape with a day to day liaison with businesses. Led by Connecting Innovation in its role as impartial objective broker of innovation support services.
- 2.4 In addition to the above, the following groups will also be established:
- The broader landscape of business support providers – individuals and organisations who will have an interest in the developing innovation ecosystem.
 - The Business Network – envisaged to be a peer-to-peer support network focused on innovation, drawing in businesses who have engaged with all the ecosystem support to add value to the existing offers.
 - Communications professionals – identified as critical ingredient of increasing innovation rates in the City Region this will involve raising the profile of all innovation support available, as well as increasing visibility of innovation, showcasing success stories and more generally creating a greater buzz around innovation.
- 2.5 The Business Network is likely to include vertical strands of network activity, including Healthtech and Space.
- 2.6 The ultimate ambition of the network is to create a better offer and experience for businesses seeking innovation support, joining up activity more coherently, exploit opportunities for increased collaboration between partners, and identify gaps in provision (and opportunities to fill those gaps).

West Yorkshire Innovation Festival

- 2.7 One of the emerging themes from the innovation study commissioned in 2019 was the importance of comms and marketing – in both promoting the extensive support offer available and profiling the innovation successes within the region. The Network recognises the importance of this and have prioritised as a quick win in their action plan delivery of the first annual West Yorkshire Innovation Festival.
- 2.8 The first of its kind for West Yorkshire, the Innovation Festival will profile both the support available in the region and some of our innovation successes. The LEP and Combined Authority's role on this, as per Connecting Innovation, is as impartial broker of innovation support. The LEP is therefore creating the platform and hosting the week, including creating marketing collateral, but partners will be responsible for organising and running their own events.

2.9 A presentation will be made at the meeting to share some of the collateral and events planned.

3. Tackling the Climate Emergency Implications

3.1 The festival and events will focus on the opportunities to drive innovation to the region's priorities, including its net zero ambitions.

4. Inclusive Growth Implications

4.1 The festival, in line with the Innovation Framework strapline 'Innovation for everyone' has an underpinning theme of increasing diversity in innovation. The events will reflect this.

5. Financial Implications

5.1 There are no financial implications directly arising from this report.

6. Legal Implications

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

7. Staffing Implications

7.1 There are no staffing implications directly arising from this report.

8. External Consultees

8.1 The West Yorkshire Innovation Network has been extensively involved in this.

9. Recommendations

9.1 That BIG Panel note the Network and the Festival and help to promote and engage with the festival and events.

10. Background Documents

10.1 None.

11. Appendices

11.1 None.