Report to:	Leeds City Region Enterprise Partnership Board (LEP Board)
Date:	8 March 2023
Subject:	**Digital Update**
Led by:	Mandy Ridyard
Lead Officer:	Phil Witcherley, Interim Head of Inclusive Economy, Skills and Culture

1. Purpose of this Report

1.1 To provide the Board with an update on recent activity relating to digital across the region and seek the Board's views next steps.

1. Information

2.1 At the October LEP Board, members discussed the importance of a renewed focus on digital tech to support the region's ambitions.

2.2 Digital is a cross-cutting issue and has the potential to enable every person and every business in the region. People need digital skills and good quality and affordable internet access to help them get the most out of their lives. All businesses need to consider, invest in and develop their approach in a way that utilises the latest advancements and innovations. This way all of our business community can be enabled to be more productive and more likely to survive and thrive. Our region also wants to be the key location for high growth digital businesses to grow and invest in.

2.3 These issues span social inclusion, place making, business support, skills, and inward investment. This, therefore, does not fall under the remit of just one committee. We need to consider how we develop all our digital work using the expertise, knowledge and connections of all committee members.

2.4 The Combined Authority have written to Michelle Donelan in her new capacity as Secretary of State for the Department of Science, Innovation and Technology. The purpose is to update on our strengths and activity in Science, Innovation and Technology and to seek further support from national government to in these areas.

Recent and ongoing work with digital

Local Digital Partnership

2.16   The Local Digital Skills Partnership is in its third and final year of DCMS funding. In creating the Digital Skills Plan, the LDSP has accomplished their core targets.

2.17   There is an opportunity, therefore, to explore how to build on the success of the LDSP including broadening the LDSP into a 'Local Digital Partnership (LDP)'. This Partnership would act as an engagement and consultancy panel to support any activity of a refreshed Digital Framework. DCMS is supportive of this.

Launch of the Digital Skills Plan

2.18   The Local Digital Skills Partnership (LDSP), with funding from DCMS, has created the region's first Digital Skills Plan after wide consultation. The Plan was launched on the 28th November, online, with a press release and link to the publication. The Plan has been received with enthusiasm across private, public, and third sector partners across the region.

2.19   The Digital Skills Plan informs the development of a comprehensive pipeline of digital skills projects:

Social Digital Inclusion

-    Build the capacity of community organisations to deliver digital skills and access to those who are digitally excluded

-    Develop programmes for those who can't access support elsewhere

Workforce for the Future

-    Attract/scale up specialist educational digital provision

-    Roll out a programme to help raise school-aged children's digital literacy

SME and Third Sector Digital Growth

-    Offer digital support through Business Growth Service and its successor programme and Digital Enterprise programmes

-    Ensure leadership and management training, including digital skills

Simplifying the Digital Offer

-    Launch a region-wide Digital Skills Campaign to inspire excitement in digital careers and increase uptake of digital skills provision

-    Seek further devolution of digital skills provision

2.20   To support the launch (led by the Employment and Skills Committee), 7 officials from DCMS visited West Yorkshire. Cllr Lewis, Chair of the Employment and Skills Committee, and Mark Roberts, LEP Chair, chaired a

series of meetings with DCMS, WYCA officers, and diverse stakeholders across the region.

2.21   The sessions included a roundtable on the Tech Ecosystem and strengths and challenges of the West Yorkshire ecosystem. This included representatives from AI Tech North, British Business Bank, Mercia, Diverse & Equal, Women in Leeds Digital, Space Hub Yorkshire, Future Transformation, digital SMEs, and the Combined Authority's Growth Service.

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2.23   A further session took place with high-profile tech businesses in the region, hosted at Cognizant's new offices. Attendees included Mphasis, Production Park, EXA, Panintelligence, Sky, SkyBet, Kirklees Local TV, Amazon Web Services, IBM, Leeds Digital Festival. This meeting considered the strengths of the tech sector in the region, and how a Local Digital Partnership might add value to existing activity. The conclusion was that a Local Digital Partnership should try not to duplicate, but instead to simplify, connect and amplify.

2.24   Throughout the day, DCMS officials commented that they were inspired by what our region has to offer, particularly noting our extraordinary stakeholders. It was clear throughout the day that we are a proactive and collaborative region, keen to build on the successful relationship to date with DCMS, and a fantastic place for digital.

Next steps: Refresh of the Digital Framework (West Yorkshire's Digital Blueprint)

2.5   The region's Digital Framework was published in 2019. Since then, the LEP's geographic remit has altered (in April 2021), moving to the five West Yorkshire districts.

2.6   With the change in geography coinciding with increased digital adoption by residents and businesses during COVID, it is timely to refresh the Digital Framework and create an updated Digital Blueprint.

2.7   By refreshing the Digital Framework, there is an opportunity to draw together all elements of digital and ensure that West Yorkshire is a 'Smart Region'.

2.8   A refreshed Digital Framework will update on how lives are transformed by digital technologies and will include a coherent strategy for delivery and partnership working, which may be framed into three strands:

-    **Place** – infrastructure, data and connectivity

- **People** – inclusion, skills and confidence, entrepreneurs, and advanced skills (much of which can be transferred from the Digital Skills Plan)
- **Businesses** – clusters, transformation, inward investment, education providers (in partnership with businesses), capital.

Building our evidence base on digital.

2.9   It is crucial that all our work on digital is our evidence base. To support our refresh, (i) a mapping of the digital tech sector in WY has been commissioned and (ii) we have conducted a deep dive discussion with LEP members on this issue.

Digital mapping

2.10   The digital mapping will:

- Map the entire West Yorkshire regional economy and provide a complete database of all businesses for future use by the Combined Authority.

- Produce granular analysis of digital sector employment.

- Provide additional data on digital sector businesses including private investment and engagement in collaborative R&D.

- Produce further sector insights into digital sector Foreign Direct Investment.

2.11   The Clusters research will be used so that we can better understand and therefore support our digital tech ecosystem. This, in tandem with the outcomes of the LEP Deep Dive will inform the refreshed Digital Framework.

2.12   The report will be available in March 2023 and will be shared with LEP members.

LEP Deep Dive

2.13   To further support the refresh of the Digital Framework, on 12th December, The LEP Chair hosted a LEP Deep Dive session on digital for private sector members of the LEP Board and wider committees, as well as other business representatives from across the region.

2.14   The Deep Dive included:

- An assessment of the current state of digital in West Yorkshire. This included looking at our strengths and weaknesses, what is working and what is not, and issues that we are not capitalising on and missing out from.
- A look ahead into the future which tried to envisage what we want digital to look like in the region.

- A gap analysis session which was aimed at bridging the current state with the desired state.

2.15   Some of the key discussions from this meeting included:

- A focus on harnessing the power of technology for social good. This included discussions on the smart cities' agenda.

- Having an increased focus on getting more SMEs adopting digital solutions for their businesses – supporting improvements to regional productivity.

- Playing to the region's existing strengths and capitalising on emerging opportunities to grow the digital/tech sector.

- Making a case for further resources and capacity to deliver transformational digital programmes across the region via further rounds of devolution.

- Having a targeted and all-encompassing vision for the region that makes us the most attractive destination for tech businesses and investment.

What are we going to do next

2.16   One of the results of the DCMS visit/Digital Skills Plan launch was an agreement between DCMS, Cognizant, WYCA and Lloyds Bank, to host a digital leadership private dinner on International Women's Day. The Mayor will host this dinner on the evening of 8th March. The aim is to convene role models, to open discussions on barriers and opportunities for digital business in West Yorkshire, and to promote the session to align with the aims of the Local Digital Partnership. Invitees include influential female digital leaders in businesses across the region.

2.17   The Local Digital Partnership meetings are to begin, chaired by the LEP Chair and informed by the Digital Clusters research and LEP Deep Dive analysis. In April this year, a visit is planned with Minister Scully (Under-Secretary of State for Tech and the Digital Economy) to meet the LDP.

2.18   Officers are working on the package of skills interventions and on the Digital Blueprint, to be delivered this year.

2.19   LEP Board members views on sought on the work outlined in this paper, the proposed next steps, and the Combined Authority's relationship re digital with the reshuffled government departments.

3.   Tackling the Climate Emergency Implications

3.1   The crosscutting work on digital, covering people, places and business, will support work tackling the climate emergency. The Digital Skills Plan will support growth of digital skills and therefore movement into "better jobs" and more productive jobs within the region. This will include growth of skills across

the region to enhance innovation across green sector to support climate challenges.

3.2   Greater adoption of digital technologies by businesses will facilitate efficiency and waste by reduction. For example: customers will be enabled to make first contact online, reducing the need to travel; paperless offices and cloud storage use less resource and energy; delivery mapping technology optimises route plans to reduce carbon emissions.

3.3   Digitally enabled infrastructure will accelerate progress towards clean, low-carbon, and resilient energy systems, as innovative urban planning, public services, and access are optimised. Examples may include smart streetlamps to self-cooling buildings to smart electric car chargers. The data captured by digitally enabled devices will provide diverse datasets on a wide range of topics, such as energy consumption, air quality, and traffic patterns. [1]

4.   Inclusive Growth Implications

4.1.   Supporting West Yorkshire's digital/tech ecosystem will positively contribute to recovery from the impact of the pandemic and to mitigate the effects of the crisis in cost of living and doing business. It is proposed that the original strapline of 'lives transformed by digital tech' is adopted in the revised version to ensure the focus remain on the positive benefits to the region's citizens.

4.2.   Delivery of the regional Digital Skills Plan will support inclusive growth across West Yorkshire. We expect to demonstrate progress, and measure take-up by underrepresented groups, through each Digital Skills intervention.

4.3   Digitally enabled places will accelerate progress towards accessible and inclusive spaces and transport in our region. An exemplar focus may include residents in rural areas without access to fast broadband; as of 2021, 4% of people in Yorkshire and Humber remain offline, despite the fact that West Yorkshire's full fibre and gigabit coverage are both above the national average.

5.   Equality and Diversity Implications

5.1   The Digital Skills Plan seeks to directly address socio-economic inequalities facing our population. Digital Inclusion is a central tenet of the plan, to be achieved through the growth/provision of digital skills and supporting the resolution of data poverty and the ongoing challenge of accessibility and connectivity.

5.2   Digital exclusion is a key barrier to participation in social and economic activity. A refreshed Digital Framework will help us to maximise the

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[1] https://www.iea.org/news/empowering-smart-cities-toward-net-zero-emissions

opportunity that integrated digital policy, people and technology can offer to improve inclusivity.

6. Financial Implications

6.1. To deliver the actions in the digital skills plan will require funding. The digital skills interventions outlined in this paper have been added to the Employment and Skills pipeline for development and as outlined in the Investment Pipeline paper.

7. Legal Implications

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

8. Staffing Implications

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

9. External Consultees

9.1. Members from the following committees attended the Deep Dive on 12th December: Business, Economy and Innovation; Climate, Energy and Environment; Employment and Skills; Place, Regeneration and Housing; and the LEP Board. A range of stakeholders including Local Authority Skills Officers, universities, college, training providers, employers and third sector have been consulted on the Digital Skills Plan's development.

10. Recommendations

10.1. The Committee is asked to provide views on the next steps proposed in this report.

11. Background Documents

11.1 None.

12. Appendices

12.1 No appendices related to this report.