



Report to:	Place, Regeneration and Housing Committee
Date:	26 October 2023
Subject:	Digital Blueprint Update
Director:	Liz Hunter, Director of Policing, Place and Environment
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Is this a key decision?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Is the decision eligible for call-in by Scrutiny?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information or appendices?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
If relevant, state paragraph number of Schedule 12A, Local Government Act 1972, Part 1:	
Are there implications for equality and diversity?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No

1. Purpose of this Report

- 1.1. To engage and seek views from Place, Regeneration and Housing Committee Members on the emerging structure of the West Yorkshire Digital Blueprint.

2. Information

Digital Blueprint

Context

- 2.1. In 2019, a Digital Framework for the Leeds City region was agreed. This was made up of 5 outcomes and focused on businesses, skills, the digital sector, digital infrastructure, and tech for good (connected places). In April 2021, the Local Enterprise Partnership's (LEP) geographic remit altered to encompass the whole of West Yorkshire. Alongside this, there has been increased digital adaptation by residents and businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic, new trading relations with the European Union, and significant advances in technology. It is therefore timely to refresh.
- 2.2. The West Yorkshire Combined Authority is proposing to refresh the Digital Framework into a new Digital Blueprint, to take us to 2030. It will cover similar objectives to the above, as well as some new ones.



- 2.3. Having a plan for the digital economy is crucial for the region. It will help boost productivity, reduce skills gaps/shortages, improve our connectivity, make us attractive for investment, and make residents' lives better.
- 2.4. For the purpose of this Digital Blueprint, officers are defining digital with the definition coined by Tom Loosemore, former Government Digital Service Deputy Director: '*applying the culture, practises, processes, and technologies of the Internet-era to respond to people's raised expectations.*'
- 2.5. Officers have worked closely with a range of stakeholders to build our approach to the Digital Blueprint. Stakeholders we have engaged with include Local Authority officers, private and public sector digital experts, academics, and LEP Board members. Engagement has included a LEP Board Digital Deep Dive, a 'Mayoral Diversity in Digital' roundtable, and multiple other consultations.
- 2.6. On 5th September 2023 Place Committee, Business, Innovation and Economy Committee and Employment and Skills Committee members, alongside the LEP Board, were invited to a private workshop with officers to discuss the themes of the Digital Blueprint. This was an opportunity to help shape the themes of the Blueprint and offer any feedback on the direction of the Blueprint.
- 2.7. The emerging Digital Blueprint will align with the [Healthtech Strategy 2022-2027](#). Together these documents will provide a strong regional narrative and policy framework for ongoing work to deliver the region's Investment Zones. The Zones are linked to the digital agenda through Healthtech / digital health and will showcase the region as the place for health tech companies and wider health innovation.

Our Approach to a West Yorkshire Digital Blueprint

- 2.8. Following the private workshop with officers on 5th September 2023, attendees made small adjustments and endorsed our approach to the Digital Blueprint. These are included in the update below and in the appendix.
- 2.9. The proposed approach to the Digital Blueprint is to focus on the 'horizontal' elements of 'Place,' 'People and Education' and 'Business and Organisations.' But what do these mean:
 - '**Place**' refers to infrastructure development, connectivity, and connected places.
 - '**People and Education**' refers to digital skills, inclusion, workforce development and educational pathways.
 - '**Business and Organisations**' refers to digital transformation, investment, entrepreneurship, innovation and research, and trade and export promotion.



2.10. Interwoven with these 3 horizontals, will be seven ‘vertical’ themes, all of which affect/are affected by the horizontals’:

1. **Showcasing** all the digital opportunities that West Yorkshire has to offer.
2. Ensuring that digital technologies make **day-to-day life** easier for West Yorkshire residents and businesses.
3. Ensuring that we are benefitting from **advanced technologies**, such as emerging work in the fields of Artificial Intelligence (AI), Virtual Reality (VR), and quantum computing.
4. Tackling **digital exclusion**.
5. Understanding and using **data** to make West Yorkshire a well-connected digital destination.
6. Establishing digital as a method to help West Yorkshire work towards tackling the **climate emergency**.
7. **Collaborative working** of digital stakeholders in West Yorkshire.

2.11. This report seeks to understand from the Committee:

Emerging Structure of the Blueprint

- a) **Is the ‘horizontal’ and ‘vertical’ approach clear and logical?**
- b) **Do the 7 proposed ‘verticals’ capture the most relevant areas of digital skills needs for West Yorkshire?**
- c) **Are any key digital infrastructure themes missing from the proposed structure?**
- d) **Are there any specific spatial issues that the need to be recognised within the ‘Place’ element of the Blueprint?**

Potential Challenges and Opportunities

- e) **What could the role of digital technology (such as 5G, Artificial Intelligence and Augmented Reality) be in our town, cities and rural areas?**
- f) **How can the public sector stimulate and accelerate commercial digital infrastructure roll out in rural or hard to reach areas?**
- g) **What are the challenges of digital exclusion from a place and infrastructure perspective and how can we tackle them?**
- h) **How should the availability of resources and capacity to deliver the Blueprint’s aspirations be considered?**



Support from the Committee

- i) **Do committee members approve officers to develop a first draft of the Digital Blueprint, in line with the proposed structure and subjects?**

Next Steps

- 2.12. A public consultation will commence in October on the Your Voice consultation platform and will be publicised by Combined Authority social media channels. This will gauge public responses to elements that will be included in the Blueprint, such as awareness of the connected places agenda and smart technology, views on AI, areas in which residents and businesses would like more skills/awareness/access to digital, and – primarily for business owners – what digital technologies they are looking to incorporate into their business.
- 2.13. Pending the feedback and approval of the underlying structure of the Digital Blueprint, this Committee will be sighted with a draft of the Digital Blueprint in January.
- 2.14. The final Blueprint is aiming for a Summer 2024 Combined Authority approval.

3. Tackling the Climate Emergency Implications

- 3.1. The West Yorkshire Combined Authority has made a bold and ambitious target to reach Net Zero by 2038. The Digital Blueprint aims to tackle the climate emergency through digital and smart infrastructure which will contribute to reduced energy consumption and innovation. Infrastructure includes smart streetlamps, sensors which monitor and manage traffic, as well as electric charging for vehicles. Data capture from smart infrastructure and local area energy plans, will help with efficient and sustainable planning. The Blueprint will also explore opportunities to map our regional assets that will allow for delivery aligned and strategic sequencing – ensuring that we need only ‘dig once’ – reducing our carbon impact.
- 3.2. Moreover, it is recognised that increased levels of connectivity, allow for residents to work remotely, and for businesses to be set up in a more decentralised format. This means that there can be a reduced need to commute, with fewer vehicles on the road, thus reducing carbon emissions.

4. Inclusive Growth Implications

- 4.1. Inclusion will underpin the Digital Blueprint, and is one of the 7 ‘verticals’, and will be interwoven throughout other ‘verticals’. The Blueprint will include and make recommendations regarding demographic information about those who are digitally excluded and reasons why e.g. skills, cost, or infrastructure. Stakeholders in community organisations and central government will be consulted on and included in recommendations around support those who are digitally excluded.



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- 4.2 Of interest to this committee, the Digital Blueprint will map out both rural and urban ‘not-spots’ (areas with little to no internet coverage) to ensure that geography is not a barrier to residents participating in an increasingly digital society. Through this exercise, officers will better understand where investment is required, thus developing programmes to ensure every community has access to reliable broadband connectivity

5. Equality and Diversity Implications

- 5.1. An Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) has been developed for the Digital Blueprint. The Blueprint will consider EDI elements such as digital as an accessibility tool for those with disabilities, e.g. working remotely. Regarding Business and Organisations, the Blueprint will take into consideration in recommendations elements such as the lack of diversity that is prevalent in venture capital investments.
- 5.2 The Digital Blueprint will map out both rural and urban ‘not-spots’ (areas with little to no internet coverage) to ensure that geography is not a barrier to residents participating in an increasingly digital society. Through this exercise, officers will better understand where investment is required, thus developing programmes to ensure every community has access to reliable broadband connectivity.

6. Financial Implications

- 6.1. Combined Authority officers are leading on the development of the Blueprint utilising existing resources. Therefore there are no financial implications directly arising from this report.

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. We have consulted with external stakeholders in the development of the Digital Blueprint to date and will continue to do so.

10. Recommendations

- 10.1. That the Committee members provide feedback and endorse the direction of the Digital Blueprint, ahead of full drafting.

11. Background Documents

There are no background documents referenced in this report.



West
Yorkshire
Combined
Authority

Tracy
Brabin
Mayor of
West Yorkshire

12. Appendices

Appendix 1 – Digital Blueprint Supporting Slides