Report to:	Business, Economy and Innovation Committee
Date:	9 November 2023
Subject:	**Digital Blueprint Update**
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Is this a key decision?	☐ Yes	☒ No
Is the decision eligible for call-in by Scrutiny?	☐ Yes	☒ No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information or appendices?	☐ Yes	☒ No
If relevant, state paragraph number of Schedule 12A, Local Government Act 1972, Part 1:		
Are there implications for equality and diversity?	☒ Yes	☐ No

1. Purpose of this Report

1.1. This report provides an update on plans for a new Digital Blueprint. Committee members' views are sought on the approach.

2. Information

Background

Digital Blueprint

2.1 Digital and technological capability will be a key area of the Economic Strategy, particularly Missions 1 and 2. However, given the broad nature of 'digital' and its significance to West Yorkshire, a separate 'Digital Blueprint' has been proposed.

2.2 The Blueprint will consider how 'digital' enables the economy to improve the lives of people in West Yorkshire. It will do so by exploring how the wider skills system, the business ecosystem, and the enveloping infrastructure can usefully convene, influence and be influenced by digital technologies.

2.3 The Combined Authority approved a Digital Framework in 2019, focusing on businesses, skills, the digital sector, digital infrastructure, and tech for good (the smart cities agenda). The West Yorkshire Combined Authority is proposing to refresh the Digital Framework into a new Digital Blueprint to take us to 2030.

2.4 Officers have worked closely with a wide range of stakeholders including LEP Board members, private and public sector digital experts, private sector employers, academics and Local Authority members, to build our approach to the Digital Blueprint.

2.5 All private sector members of the Employment and Skills Committee (alongside Place Committee, Business, Innovation and Economy Committee, and LEP Board) were invited to a workshop to discuss help shape the themes of the Digital Blueprint as it is developed.

The Digital Blueprint's Approach

2.6 As a result of the private workshop, attendees approved the approach and proposed adjustments, which are included in the update below and in the appendix.

2.7 The proposed approach of the Digital Blueprint is to focus on the 'horizontal' elements of 'Place', 'People and Education' and 'Business and Organisations'.

- 'Place' refers to smart city initiatives, infrastructure development, connectivity and connected places.
- 'People and Education' refers to digital: skills; inclusion; workforce development; educational pathways.
- 'Business and Organisations' refers to digital: transformation; investment; entrepreneurship; innovation and research; trade and export promotion.

2.8 Interwoven with the horizontals, will be 7 'vertical' themes, all of which affect/are affected by the 'horizontals'. The verticals are as follows, in the order prioritised by the private sector committee member consultation:

- Ensuring that we are benefitting from **advanced technologies**, such as AI, VR, quantum.
- **Showcasing** all the digital opportunities that West Yorkshire has to offer.
- Ensuring that digital technologies make **day-to-day life** easier for West Yorkshire residents and businesses.
- Tackling **digital exclusion**.
- **Collaborative working** of digital stakeholders in West Yorkshire.
- Understanding and using **data** to make West Yorkshire a well-connected digital destination.
- Establishing digital as a method to help West Yorkshire work towards tackling the **climate emergency**.

2.9 A public consultation will be published in October and publicised by Combined Authority social media channels. This will gauge the public response to elements that will be included in the Blueprint, such as views on AI, the ways in which digital technologies impact their lives (positively or negatively), areas in which they'd like more skills/awareness/access to digital, online safety confidence, awareness of Smart Cities/Connected Place, and – for business owners – what digital technologies they are looking to incorporate into their business.

2.10 The first draft of the Digital Blueprint draft will be presented at a future Committee, aiming for a Summer 2024 Combined Authority approval and publication. Officers would like to thank the private sector members who engaged with the private workshop.

3. Tackling the Climate Emergency Implications

3.1 The Digital Blueprint aims to tackle the climate emergency through inclusion of elements such as evolution of digital skills supporting sectors developing and innovating their sustainability, support of 'better jobs', skills training for retrofitters of fibre and copper (internet access) and smart homes.

3.2 The Blueprint will also cover elements of adoption of digital tech by businesses and organisations which will facilitate efficiency and reduce waste, and refer to the opportunities for remote working (which has implications on reducing travel and paper). Digital and smart infrastructure will contribute to reduced energy use, such as smart street lamps, electric vehicles etc. Data capture from smart infrastructure – and local area energy plans and grids - will help with efficient and sustainable planning. Asset mapping allows delivery alignment and strategic sequencing to ensure we 'dig once', which saves on carbon.

4. Inclusive Growth Implications

4.1. Recommendations outlined in the Digital Blueprint will have implications for West Yorkshire businesses and organisations, aimed at catalysing inclusive growth using digital.

5. Equality and Diversity Implications

5.1 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.

5.2 The Blueprint will consider EDI element 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. The Blueprint will map out the rural and urban 'not-spots' (areas without any internet coverage) to ensure that geography is not a barrier to participating in an increasingly digital society.

6. Financial Implications

6.1. 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. No external consultations have been undertaken.

10. Recommendations

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

11. Background Documents

There are no background documents referenced in this report.

12. Appendices

Appendix 1 – Digital Blueprint.