



Report to:	Employment and Skills Committee
Date:	15 February 2024
Subject:	Digital Blueprint and Digital Inclusion
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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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No

1. Purpose of this Report

- 1.1. This report provides a draft of the new Digital Blueprint. Committee members' feedback, and endorsement, are sought.
- 1.2. This report provides an update on progress in the year since the Digital Skills Plan was launched, including the West Yorkshire Digital Inclusion initiative.

2. Information

Background

- 2.1. This paper begins with a request for feedback on the draft of the Digital Blueprint. The Blueprint is a development of the Digital Skills Plan, which places skills as an enabler of the wider digital system. Next, this paper updates on West Yorkshire's progress in digital skills since the launch of the Digital Skills Plan (December 2022) and the interventions that the Combined Authority has led in that time. One of the interventions is the Digital Inclusion West Yorkshire initiative, which this paper focuses on in the final section.

Digital Blueprint

- 2.2. An update of the Digital Blueprint and its approach was brought to the last Employment and Skills Committee on 19 October 2023 (as well as the Business, Economy, Innovation Committee on 9 November 2023 and the Place Committee on 26 October 2023.)

2.3 Feedback endorsed the direction of travel within the alignment of the Economic Strategy. Officers have incorporated this feedback, alongside the previous input from 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. 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 September workshop to help shape the themes of the Digital Blueprint as it was developed.

2.5 A public consultation was live for four weeks from late October until late November 2023. This received 121 responses. The draft Digital Blueprint includes some initial results.

A Reminder of the Digital Blueprint's Approach

2.6 The Digital Blueprint focuses on the 'horizontal' or 'levers' of:

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

2.7 Interwoven with the horizontal, are 7 'vertical' or 'cultural' themes, all of which affect/are affected by the 'horizontal'. The verticals are as follows, in the order prioritised by the private sector committee member consultation: advanced technologies; showcasing West Yorkshire; hybrid digitisation; digital inclusion; convening; data; sustainability.

2.8 Pending the endorsement of ESC, BEIC and Place Committees, the Digital Blueprint will be taken to the Combined Authority Committee, ahead of approval and publication.

2.9 The Committee is asked to consider the following:

- Is the content of the Digital Blueprint reflective of the digital skills needs in the region?
- Are the outcomes, as they relate to people and education, ambitious enough? If not, how could they be bolder?
- Do you have any other feedback or advice on how the Digital Blueprint could be improved, ahead of going to design?

Digital Skills One Year On

2.10 The Digital Blueprint is an evolution of the region's first Digital Skills Plan, published in December 2022 under the steer of the Local Digital Skills Partnership.

- 2.11 The Digital Skills Plan aimed to increase the numbers of residents with Essential Digital Skills for Life (75%) and Work (59%) to match the leading region's 82% and 69%, respectively, by 2025 (data published in 2021). In line with the Equality Act (2010), diversity metrics were embedded throughout our targets. Over the last year, Lloyds and IPSOS MORI have removed the pre-requisites from the Essential Digital Skills Framework.*¹ Within the new bands of the framework, the 2023 statistics are as follows: Essential Digital Skills for Life (95%), making Yorkshire and the Humber the leading region, and Essential Digital Skills for Work (85%), just 1% behind the leading region.
- 2.12 Prior to the launch of the Digital Skills Plan, West Yorkshire had made progress in digital skills largely through the DCMS-funded Local Digital Skills Partnership (LDSP), created as part of the devolution deal. The LDSP brought together skills provision, acted as a test-bed for offers, and was a conduit to bring together stakeholders and partners to add value to the region's digital skills growth. Much of the LDSP's work took place during the covid lockdowns and convened and monitored the following:
- 2,310 individuals enrolled on community or foundation ICT courses
 - 34,000 laptops/devices were donated to children or residents
 - 938 individuals enrolled in Skills Connect digital courses
 - 8,103 students and teachers took part in virtual work experience
 - 4,890 individuals enrolled or qualified from Computing or ICT HE/FE and apprenticeships
 - 23 schools were supported by 18 Enterprise Advisers in digital roles/sectors via Schools Partnerships
 - 671 SMEs received digital support through Business Support / Skills for Growth
 - 1,720 SMEs took part in digital events run by private partner organisations
 - £728,000 of levy was pledged for digital apprenticeships. 22 businesses were supported by the apprenticeship levy re digital
 - 15,422 views on futuregoals.co.uk
 - Launch of IBM SkillsBuild platform

¹ Previously, an individual had to have the Foundation level to be eligible for EDS for Life, and had to have EDS for Life to be eligible for EDS for Work. Now, someone can start their digital journey in any of the framework areas and will be counted within the measure.

- 2.13 Nationally, the LDSP funding has now ceased. West Yorkshire is continuing its legacy through the development of the Digital Blueprint.
- 2.14 Appendix 2 gives an overview of the initiatives have been delivered or developed since the launch of the Digital Skills Plan, which aim to turn the dial on digital skills shortages and gaps.

Digital Inclusion

- 2.15 The West Yorkshire Digital Inclusion initiative aims to address the following challenges: 5% of residents in Yorkshire and the Humber do not have essential digital skills for life. The close association between digital exclusion and other dimensions of inequality underpins an urgent social and economic need to act. Delivering the right interventions to support those who are digitally excluded will have wider social benefits on people and communities, such as health, regeneration and education, thus requiring a collaborative, community-based approach and a resilient third sector. As well as social and ethical reasons to add benefit to the community, there is a strong economic case to be made for digital inclusion. It has been estimated that if everyone in the UK was able to go online, it would add another £63 billion to the economy.
- 2.16 The objectives of the initiative are to: boost the capacity of community organisations in each Local Authority area of West Yorkshire to deliver digital inclusion, equitably and within a flexible model appropriate to the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion needs of each LA area; enable staff and volunteers within organisations in West Yorkshire to support digitally excluded residents; develop the digital inclusion system within each Local Authority; enable community organisations to financially support their beneficiaries to access broadband, devices and courses; gather insight into what works to encourage the digitally excluded to gain digital skills.
- 2.17 £746,000 of Gainshare funding has been approved (at the CA Committee in June 2023) to achieve these objectives. Via Grant Funding Agreement, the funding will be used to appoint Digital Inclusion Officers until March 2026 in City of Bradford District Metropolitan Council, Calderdale Metropolitan Borough Council, Kirklees Council and Wakefield Council and to boost the capacity of the 100% Digital Leeds City Council service.
- 2.18 This approach has been developed with nominated officers in each Local Authority and ensures that existing Digital Inclusion programmes within each Local Authority retain their identity whilst demonstrating a regional collaboration. It takes the learnings and best practice from the model established by 100% Digital Leeds and applying them flexibly in other areas.
- 2.19 The programme was soft-launched at the [West Yorkshire Innovation Festival](#) by the Mayor and Leonardo Tantari (the pioneer of the 100% Digital Leeds model). 70 participants attended from health organisations, charities, community organisations in West Yorkshire and other regions, many of whom have expressed their interest in getting

involved as a beneficiary of the initiative. Recruitment and the set up of the Steering Group will take place in early 2024, with delivery expected to commence from April 2024.

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. The Blueprint covers 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 residents, businesses and organisations, aimed at catalysing inclusive growth using digital.

5. Equality and Diversity Implications

- 5.1 Inclusion will underpin the Digital Blueprint as one of the 7 themes, and will be interwoven throughout. The Blueprint will include recommendations regarding demographic information about those who are digitally excluded because of lack of access to skills, resources, or infrastructure.
- 5.2 The Digital Inclusion initiative has clear positive impact regarding protected characteristics. It will help beneficiaries of a range of charities and community organisations, such as Housing Associations, Care Homes, Addiction Services. These cohorts will learn how to use digital to manage their finances, navigate the health system, apply for jobs, access housing and benefits, enjoy leisure activities and improve their mental wellbeing.

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 notes the progress made since the publication of the Digital Skills Plan, particularly on the West Yorkshire Digital Inclusion initiative.

10.2 That the Committee endorses the Digital Blueprint, with current progress in mind.

10.3 In the case of outstanding feedback from members, that the Committee delegates endorsement to the Chair, ahead of the final design.

11. Background Documents

There are no background documents referenced in this report.

12. Appendices

Appendix 1 – Digital Blueprint Draft.

Appendix 2 – Digital Skills Plan, one year on