WMCA Board

Date	15 January 2021
Report title	West Midlands Digital Roadmap
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Report has been considered by	Strategic Economic Delivery Board - 17 December 2020 WMCA Programme Board

Recommendations for action or decision:

WMCA Board is recommended to:

(1)   Agree the West Midlands Digital Roadmap and commit to collaboration on the 5 missions outlined.

1.   Purpose

1.1.   This paper shares the proposed West Midlands Digital Roadmap, for discussion and agreement by WMCA Board.

2.   Context

2.1   The West Midlands has areas of significant strength in digital. WM5G's activities have secured the best 5G connectivity of any CA area. The region was selected for an initial pilot of the £5m 'beat the bots' digital retraining programme, and recently secured an additional £1.5m from Government. TfWM are widely recognised as national leaders in using data to drive service improvement, and have been crucial public sector partners to firms working on the future of mobility.

2.2   Local Authorities provide leadership on a range of digital activities, with many introducing new schemes to promote digital inclusion and focussing on digital infrastructure in the built environment as part of a move towards smart cities.

2.3   Digital is a golden thread throughout the Local Industrial Strategy and the sector action plans. It is both a regional strength as part of the broader Digital and Creative sector and an enabler for all four major market opportunities. An Innovation Ecosystem audit led by the MIT REAP project identified 24 schemes across LEPs, Universities, and other partners that provide digitally focussed business support, including GBSLEP's Digital Skills Training, Aston University's Think Beyond Data and Coventry University's Focus Digital.

2.4   The WMCAs work on a regional Digital Roadmap starts from this position of strength, and seeks to do three things:

- Review existing digital activity and bring together in a single strategic framework
- Identify gaps and opportunities within existing and potential digital activity
- Address challenges arising from Covid-19 to our current digital approach, especially related to access

2.5   For the purpose of this roadmap, we have defined 'digital' broadly – encompassing all the spheres where digital technologies have the potential to improve the lives of our communities. We have focussed on the two spheres where digital technologies are applied – the Digital Economy and Digital Government – and the three underpinning foundations for digital – Access (both inclusion and skills), Data, and Infrastructure.

3.   Process

3.1   Between August and December 2020, the WMCA facilitated a collaborative process to understand current digital activity and begin shaping the roadmap. This began with a series of workshops attended by officers from the WMCA, WM5G, LAs, LEPs, and Universities, focussing on long-term visions for digital in the region, current challenges in realising that vision, and areas where regional activity could add value. We also held interviews with the IT and Digital leads from constituent Local Authorities to understand their digital activities and long-term plans.

3.2   The WMCA also established a time-limited External Advisory Group for the Digital Roadmap, co-chaired by Professor Kerry Kirwan (Deputy Pro-Vice Chancellor at the University of Warwick and Trustee of the Turing Institute) and Emily Middleton (Partner, Public Digital). This brought together national experts from the public, private, and third sectors to shape and challenge the emerging proposals for the Digital Roadmap.

4.   Digital Roadmap - Content

4.1.   The Digital Roadmap sets out 5 core missions for the region:

- Securing access for everyone to digital opportunities, particularly those in poverty
- Sharing and using data to improve people's lives
- Becoming the UK's best-connected region
- Realising the potential of digital to transform our economy and build economic resilience
- Using digital public services to build a fairer, greener, healthier region

4.2   Alongside these missions are a set of proposed outcomes to provide more focus, which align with the key strategic indicators from the annual State of the Region report.

4.3   Each outcome has a set of associated regional activity, which combines several categories:

- Current funded activity that will carry on into 2021-26 and supports achievement of outcomes
- Proposed new activity for which we are seeking funding that is featured in our Recharging the West Midlands investment case, Community Recovery Roadmap, and/or Spending Review Submission
- Potential new activity that we are exploring, and is at an earlier stage, and therefore we are not at a point where we are clear on required investment

4.4   This regional activity builds on work that led by Local Authorities, LEPs, and others that we've engaged with in the development of the roadmap. We haven't sought to comprehensively capture all digital activity here, but coordinated activity at scale will be essential for achieving the 5 missions.

4.5   Each mission also has a set of key activities for 2021 – these are not intended to be a full action plan, but instead a small number of 'lighthouse' projects that indicate the type of action needed in order to achieve outcomes and make progress on the 5 missions.

5.   Digital Roadmap – Governance and Delivery

5.1   To guide the delivery of the Digital Roadmap, the WMCA will convene a 'Digital Roadmap Steering Group' bringing together LAs, LEPs, WMGC, WM5G, Universities, the private sector, and other public sector organisations.

5.2   This group will be guided by a small number of key principles:

•   Ensure that all activity takes place at the right level, and that anything taking place regionally adds value by joining dots or filling gaps
•   Balance the coordination of different strands with focussed delivery by teams and organisations that have the expertise
•   Work in a way that builds capacity in communities and civil society, harnessing the power of relationships

6.   Financial Implications

6.1   There are no additional financial implications as a result of the recommendations within this report. There is an annual Digital budget of £100k within the Culture and Digital portfolio to support this proposed WM Digital Roadmap.

6.2   As per section 5.3, the investment required to deliver the outcomes within the core missions of this roadmap has been requested through a combination of Recharging the West Midlands investment case, Community Recovery Roadmap, and/or the Spending Review Submission.

7.   Legal Implications

7.1.   There are no direct legal implications arising from the report.

8.   Equalities Implications

8.1   The paper is looking to improve access to digital opportunities, particularly for those in poverty. This is crucial, especially under the current climate, where it is becoming apparent that digital exclusion is likely to further widen the inequality gap. The increasing digitisation of our economies (significantly accelerated by Covid-19) means that digital skills, digital accessibility and digital affordability are becoming even more critical in determining outcomes and those digitally excluded are likely to be left further behind. Key excluded groups include people from lower socio-economic backgrounds, older people, disabled people and people from ethnic minority backgrounds.

9.   Inclusive Growth Implications

9.1   At this stage, the inclusive growth implications of this work are positive, particularly owing to the specific missions focused on digital inclusion and digital public services. These will ultimately enable people to benefit from the opportunities that investment into digital skills, technology and capabilities will unlock. As the collaborative work around these missions matures, it will be important to gain a deeper understanding of the types of digital exclusion experienced by people and places in this region, and how those intersect with other barriers: this will enable effective prioritisation of those who are most in need.

10.   Geographical area of report's implications

10.1   Co-ordination around the Digital Roadmap extends to all constituent members, with additional engagement to coordinate with non-constituent members wherever possible. Elements of the digital economy mission relate to the 3 LEP Geography.

11.   Schedule of Background Papers

11.1.   Appendix 1 – Table of Current WMCA Digital Activity

11.2.   Appendix 2 - West Midlands Digital Roadmap

Appendix 1 – Table of Current WMCA Digital Activity

Mission 1 – Digital Inclusion and Skills	• Adult Education Budget funded digital skills programmes (through Adult and Community Learning Providers, Colleges, and other providers) • Support for the regional Digital Skills Partnership, bringing together private and third sector digital skills provision
Mission 2 – Sharing and Using Data	• Office for Data Analytics • TfWM Data Insights Team • Regional Transport Coordination Centre • Partnership with WM-REDI
Mission 3 – Digital Infrastructure	• WM5G Barrier Busting activity to accelerate 5G rollout • Proposals in Recharge the West Midlands investment case on fibre and 5G acceleration
Mission 4 – Digital Economy	• Digital as a 'golden thread' throughout Local Industrial Strategy and a core part of the Recharge the West Midlands investment proposal • Digital as core element of WM Innovation Programme, particularly in relation to advanced manufacturing • WM5G Innovation Centres (powered by 5PRING) • Support for digital in the creative sector through Create Central and the Creative Scale-Up programme
Mission 5 – Digital Public Services	• TfWM digital innovation to reduce congestion and improve passenger experience • WM5G projects on health and social care • Circular Economy Taskforce work on digital platforms • Thrive at Home resources, supported by the Midlands Engine Mental Health and Productivity Pilot