



**WEST MIDLANDS**  
COMBINED AUTHORITY

## Board Meeting

<b>Date</b>	8 September 2017
<b>Report title</b>	WMCA Digital Board
<b>Cabinet Member Portfolio Lead</b>	Cllr John Clancy, portfolio lead for economic growth
<b>Accountable Chief Executive</b>	Martin Reeves – Chief Executive of the WMCA Email – <a href="mailto:martin.reeves@coventry.gov.uk">martin.reeves@coventry.gov.uk</a>
<b>Accountable Employee</b>	Nick Taylor – advisor to the Mayor Email – <a href="mailto:nick.taylor@wmca.org.uk">nick.taylor@wmca.org.uk</a>
<b>Report to be/has been considered by</b>	WMCA Board

### Recommendation(s) for action or decision:

#### The Combined Authority Board is recommended to:

1. Approve the establishment of the Digital Board (“DB”), focused on developing a Digital strategy for the region, and bringing together the various strands of activity in the space across local authorities, LEPs and other groups.
2. Approve the remit and key objectives of the DB, to allow work to start immediately on developing the strategy.

#### 1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 To share the Mayor’s proposed approach to developing a Digital strategy for the West Midlands, in order to maximise the opportunities arising from enhancing the digital skills base of the region’s workforce, developing our digital infrastructure and attracting business to the region.

## **2.0 Background**

- 2.1 As noted in the Mayor's digital manifesto "Digital is vital to the continued success of the West Midlands economy because it is the golden thread across all the industries which will provide jobs in the twenty-first century. Advanced manufacturing, automotive, life sciences, professional services, construction, low carbon, transport, healthcare, and public services are all being transformed by the power of digital technologies."
- 2.2 This document and the attached paper (Appendix 1) summarise the key aspects of the proposed focus on Digital, in particular the need to set up a group to focus on developing our digital strategy and implementing ideas to develop the skills and infrastructure needed to allow the region to prosper and gain a reputation as a hub for Digital.
- 2.3 A clear strategy is needed now to ensure that we have clarity in thinking and vision, and a consistency of approach across the region. Digital affects all areas of the WMCA and immediate progress is essential to ensure we can implement the right strategy that will enable policy objectives to be met. Having a Digital Board bringing focus to this is central to achieving such objectives.
- 2.4 The Board will particularly focus on the following broad areas:
  - 2.4.1 Development of a larger digitally-skilled workforce – in particular with education and training involving of West Midlands businesses, to ensure the skills being taught are both practical and relevant;
  - 2.4.2 Improving the region's digital infrastructure, to maximise connectivity, productivity and position the region for future technology developments (e.g. 5G); and
  - 2.4.3 Use the above to attract business to the region

- 2.5 The Digital Board will comprise a core group of some 8-12 individuals from across a range of backgrounds in both public and private sector, who will provide strategic direction and guidance.
- 2.6 Supporting the Board will be smaller groups comprising people with relevant skills and experience, who will specialise on individual aspects of the strategy, and develop approaches and solutions to embed Digital thinking across the region. Further detail on the structure of the Board is provided in the attached document.

## **3.0 Wider WMCA Implications**

- 3.1 The programme will leverage off existing groups, structures and taskforces within the WMCA, to avoid duplication of work. In particular the work of the West Midlands Digital Group, as well as the findings of the Science and Innovation Audit. Fundamental to the group is the bringing together of the various strands of siloed work, to ensure a joined-up approach across the region. The Board will also link into wider strategic thinking, e.g. Devolution Strategy Group, to ensure appropriate digital focus in all relevant areas.

## **4.0 Progress, options, discussion, etc.**

- 4.1 The Board is to be convened during September 2017, with a strategy to put in place as soon after that date as possible. Once the Board is in place the structure of interactions will be

formalised. An outline of the structure and timeline is included in the attached paper. We propose the Board will operate over an indefinite period of time, rather than be a short-term structure. This reflects the need for continual focus on the Digital agenda.

## **5.0 Financial implications**

- 5.1 At this stage no financial resource is requested.

## **6.0 Legal implications**

- 6.1 There are no immediate legal implications arising from this report particularly as no specific proposals have yet been identified. It will be necessary to keep any subsequent proposals under review to ensure that they are within the legal powers available to the Combined Authority now or in the future. No specific delegations are being requested from the Board at this stage so proposals in the future may also require Board approval to implement but this can be considered as and when necessary through liaison with the Legal/Governance team within the Combined Authority.

## **7.0 Equalities implications**

- 7.1 There are no immediate equalities implications arising from this report.

## **8.0 Schedule of background papers**

- 8.1 None

## **9.0 Appendices**

- 9.1 Appendix 1 – Digital Board Briefing Pack