

WMCA Digital Board

Briefing Paper

Context

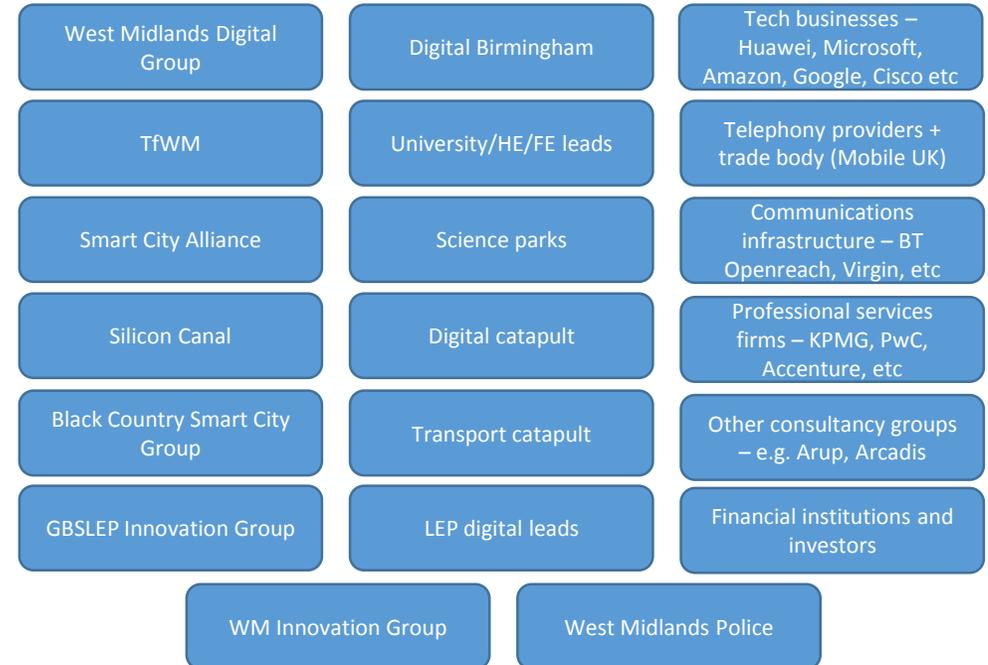
- The WMCA's Strategic Economic Plan is grounded in the overriding strategy of rapid acceleration in growth, employment and productivity through targeted actions in key sectors, enhanced innovation incubation and skills development alongside public sector reform. Key objectives are:
 - **Economic growth** – *improve the region's GVA;*
 - **Employment and skills** - *improve the balance between the skills that businesses need and the skills of local people;*
 - **Accessibility**- *improve the connectivity of people and businesses to jobs and markets;*
 - **Business competitiveness and productivity** - *improve the productivity (GVA) of businesses, focusing on growth sectors;*
 - **Land** - *improve the quantity of high quality, readily available development sites that meet housing and business needs;*
 - **Public service reform** - *secure better for less from public services, improve the life chances and health and wellbeing of communities;*
 - **Housing** – *provide a greater and broader range of homes, and*
 - **Environment** - *improved competitiveness through energy and resource efficiency, stimulating new technology and business.*
- Digital is a vital part of the SEP, cutting across all industries in the region (as well as being an important sector in its own right), with technological improvements transforming our industries. With innovation, technological development, and therefore a digital focus, all being a core part of improving growth and productivity, it is essential that we have a clear digital strategy and act now to embrace the change that digital is bringing.
- At present there are numerous disparate groups across the West Midlands who have a digital focus, however such groups do not always work consistently and in a joined-up fashion. Central to our plans for Digital is the establishment of a Digital Board and working groups, which will ensure rigour, consistency and direction to the WMCA's digital strategy.
- The development of the digital strategy and formation of the Digital Board builds on Mayor's digital manifesto and findings of the Science and Innovation Audit, as well as the work of the various digital-focused groups in the region.

Aims of this paper

- This paper summarises;
 - Current digital activities
 - The objectives of the WMCA's Digital Board
 - the key governance structures we are proposing to help delivery of these objectives; and
 - the core areas of the digital strategy, and the key upfront actions and investments required to gain initial traction in achieving our aims.

There is currently no single body with full responsibility for driving our digital agenda

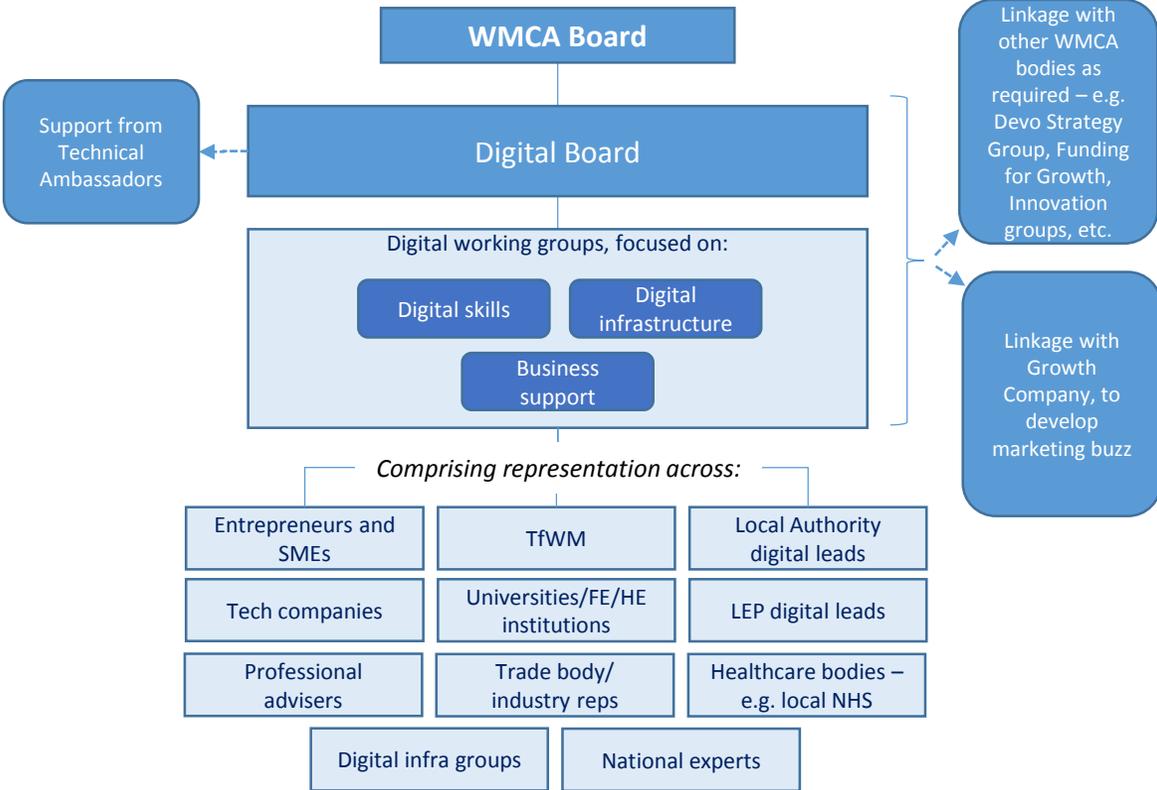
- Numerous groups have been formed/are forming that have a specific remit but are siloed in their approach. Progress so far on the region's digital agenda has been led, in particular, by the West Midlands Digital Group, chaired by Sarah Windrum (CWLEP) and Digital Birmingham, which has done a great deal to progress digital initiatives. However, greater coordination and collaboration is needed both within the public sector, but also with the private sector.
- There is a lack of coordination and understanding of how these groups can collaborate, and there is therefore no shared understanding of the outcomes that these group are delivering.
- Many of the strands of activities within in these groups are duplicated and at times conflict with each other.
- There is a lack of digital and smart city expertise and resources across the local authorities.
- The private sector/government bodies/consultations bodies have no single point of contact with the WMCA.



This results in us under-selling the region's strengths and capabilities

Proposed governance structure

We propose the following governance structure to improve collaboration and focus on the Digital agenda, in order to drive social, environmental and economic improvement.



- **Digital Board** - approximately 8-12 members meeting bi-monthly, who can bring strategic influence and drive to support the development of the digital strategy, and provide direction and oversight of key activities and projects. They will bring expertise, knowledge of sectors and establish key priorities.
- The Mayor will make initial appointments to the Digital Board, in consultation with the portfolio holder.
- Supporting the Board will be a group of **Technical Ambassadors**, high profile contacts in the digital/tech sector, who can provide support around strategic direction and profile-building.
- **Working groups** – groups across the WMCA region, focused on driving the implementation of Digital objectives. Key to this will be the need to plug into the various networks around the region, and represent such groups and bodies – e.g. Smart City Alliance, Silicon Canal and Digital Leaders - to enhance the WMCA region’s digital/smart capabilities, innovation potential and reputation. The groups will comprise both public and private sector membership, to broaden perspectives and experience.
- These groups will focus on the specific areas of implementation of the digital strategy, and will be supplemented by specific experts in relevant fields, to contribute their knowledge and expertise in specific areas of focus.
- The focus will be to drive and help influence WMCA strategy in developing smarter approaches to how the region tackles growth underpinned by the application of data, technology and systems in an integrated approach. In doing this it will link to and shape local and regional strategic priorities enabling Digital to be embedded in our approach to how we address key policy areas:
 - Utilise the assets (data, talent, location, infrastructure & people) of the region in a more connected and integrated way to tackle regional challenges.
 - Promote greater investment in use of disruptive technologies and systems by private sector to support public sector service delivery through a user & demand led approach.
 - Drive business growth and capabilities in the use of data and technologies that will propel innovation in delivery of new applications and services, enhance business growth opportunities and export potential of the region and exploit Big Data and Internet of Things economies.
- Given the wider network of partnerships, focus will be on ensuring greater collaboration with other active stakeholder groups already established to drive innovation and support smart city activity. This will be important in ensuring we make the most of limited resources, funding and investment. A secretariat of representatives from across the region may be formed to support delivery of the Digital Board’s objectives.

Key objectives of the Digital Board

The principal aim of the Digital Board will be to develop a coherent digital strategy for the region, and monitor progress over a long-term period of time towards achieving such ambitions.

To achieve this, the Board will focus on the following:

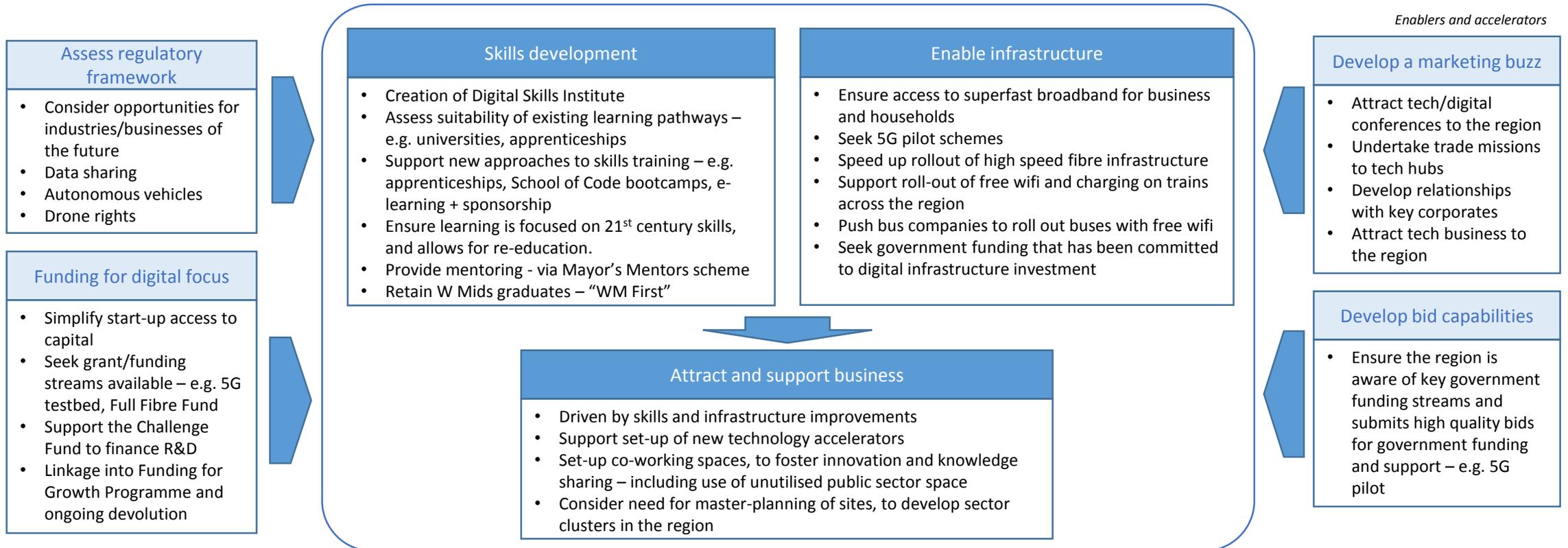
1. Gather the numerous strands and working groups focused on Digital strategies across the WMCA, to ensure a joined-up and collaborative approach to delivering the strategy. This will not duplicate the work of existing groups/activities such as the West Midlands Digital Group and the Science and Innovation Audit, but will seek to build on the good work already undertaken.
2. Develop and champion powerful and sustainable propositions that will drive Digital take-up across the region and position the West Midlands as a leading region in terms of embracing technological developments and becoming a 'centre of excellence' for Digital technologies. These include the following, themed around 'Skills', 'Infrastructure' and 'Business support':
 - Bring business and educational establishments together, to ensure we are able to train the next generation of Midlands talent in **relevant** digital skills that employers want and need.
 - Develop a Digital Skills Institute, to support in the learning of key digital skills in the region, and increase the pool of digital talent in the region.
 - Set up mechanisms and funding to support tech/digital start-ups, and in conjunction with an expanded talent pool, attract businesses to the region.
 - Engage with key digital infrastructure stakeholders, to look at how our digital infrastructure can be improved across the region
4. Engage with existing WMCA bodies to ensure Digital is embedded within our region's broader priorities – e.g. ongoing devolution discussions.
5. Consider further objectives and areas that should be considered for ongoing focus



The ambition:
Become a globally recognised centre of excellence for digital technology, skills and infrastructure

The Digital agenda

As well as the core areas of skills, infrastructure and business support, linkage with broader areas is critical, to ensure the strategy is delivered



Key programmes, e.g. accelerators and skills programmes, will be mapped to key SEP sectors and key sector areas flagged within the Science and Innovation Audit

Next steps

Membership and terms of reference:

- Identify membership of the Board structure set out on the earlier pages of this document.
- Confirm terms of reference of the Board
- Explore initial requirements to set up and operate the structure, including secretariat and chair roles that would be required to oversee activities and ensure timely progress is made.

Other immediate actions:

- Kick-off development of co-sponsored accelerator programmes to drive digital take-up and start-up focus
- Explore potential for use of unused public sector offices as co-working spaces
- Develop approaches to improving digital skills in the region
- Coordinate response to near-term infrastructure funding opportunities – e.g. 5G testbed pilot, Full Fibre Fund

