**DIGITAL CONNECTIVITY BOARD MEETING**

**Minutes of the Cheshire and Warrington Local Enterprise Partnership Digital Connectivity Board Meeting  
held 28 September 2022 at 4.30pm by video conference call**

**Present:**

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| Rupert Collis (Dpty Chair) | Calum Lewis | Richard Bailey |  |
| Kathryn Eade | Helen Gopsill |  |  |

**In attendance:**

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| Roy Newton | Ian Brooks | Charles Jarvis | Stephen Fitzsimmons |  |

**Apologies:**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Nicola Dunbar (Chair) | Connor Diskin | Sarah Williams | Eleanor Blackburn | Becky Stuttard |

**Members of the Public (for Part A):**

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| N/A |  |  |  |  |

**Agenda Item 1: Apologies and Introductions**

* 1. Rupert Collis welcomed members. Apologies were noted as above.

**Agenda Item 2: Conflicts of Interest**

2.1 None. [An ongoing conflict was noted for Rupert Collis in that Fisher German are acting for Cadent with respect to Hynet].

**Agenda Item 3: Minutes of Meeting 31st August 2022 and Matters Arising**

3.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 31st August, 2022 were accepted as an accurate record.

Matters Arising

3.2 RC highlighted the point raised in August that we may be able influence the allocation of SPF funds towards meeting digital priorities. CJ informed the board that he will be presenting an investment prospectus for digital infrastructure to Growth Directors on 20th October. IB will meet with CJ prior to the meeting.

**Agenda Item 4: Public presentation**

4.1 There were no public presentations.

**Agenda Item 5: Update on Digital Skills and Skills Bootcamps.**

5.1 In the absence of SW, IB provided a short verbal update. SW had provided the board with a draft copy of the latest skills report, which is a comprehensive study. The report addresses skills through the lens of the needs of the business community, digital occupations and the digital sector and explores less consumer attitudes towards obtaining those skills or seeking employment in the digital sector. These are issues that will be researched further. Recognising that parents are key influencers over the choices made by young people, the Pledge is commissioning some market research to examine the knowledge and awareness of digital opportunities. In addition, the LEP is planning to commission a study which will seek to inform our understanding of the barriers to digital uptake. The specification was a later item on the agenda.

5.2 IB reminded members that two procurement rounds of bootcamps had been completed. After the initial establishment of 3 bootcamps, as a pilot, lot 2 had sought interest to deliver 9 bootcamps mostly focussed on digital skills. This round had been partially successful, but some expressions were not taken forward to contracts. To complete the programme, it has been necessary to run a third round of procurement for which the LEP adapted its approach. Rather than set specific requirements for potential bids, the LEP tried an open approach seeking bids from providers/employers so long as they met one or other of the DfE eligible themes. At the time of the meeting 12 E.o.I had been received, from 7 providers. While the training proposed is not “purely” digital, e.g., perhaps focussed on a subject in advanced manufacturing, many of the programmes include a strong digital element. If these proposals move to the contract stage, we will complete the full allocation of funding and targeted learners.

**Agenda Item 6. Progress against delivery plan 2022-23**

6.1 IB explained that this item, at the half year point, was to take stock of our progress towards achieving the objectives set out in the 2022-23 delivery plan, to identify work started, delayed completed, or stopped in favour of new priorities. P&I is also taking an interest in monitoring performance.

6.2 The plan has three key objectives, supported by seven actions. A half year progress report in Appendix A has been composed from the discussion.

**Agenda Item 7: Consultants’ Brief – “Understanding the barriers to connectivity”.**

7.1 IB presented an early working draft for a consultants’ brief to seek support towards achieving a better understanding of the barriers to connectivity, which might include issues of infrastructure, skills and capability, motivation and affordability. IB explained this study would build on and complement work already undertaken, e.g. the Digital Skills Report and a survey being carried out by the Pledge.

7.2 Feedback from members was that while the detail of requirements was clear, further work was needed to ensure greater specificity of outputs and deliverables. It is also important to reach beyond analysis of the current situation and address questions of, So What?

7.3 IB will work up the specification and seek to launch the tender before the next DCB.

ACTION: IB

**Agenda Item 8: Any Other Business**

8.1 No items

**Date and Time of next meetings**

Tuesday, October 25th 2022, 4.30pm-6.00pm.

**Appendix A: Progress Against Delivery Plan (September 2022)**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Cementing and establishing partnership networks within the sub-region and neighbouring regions** | | | **Status (30/9/2022)** | **Comments** |
|  | Define a governance structure, alongside local authorities and Connecting Cheshire, of digital across the sub-region | Q1 | A | Closer working between the DCB, Connecting Cheshire and Local Authorities has progressed. Deliberations connected to the LEP Review have postponed bringing proposals forward until the more general positioning of the LEP is understood. |
|  | Establish new Governance Structure | Q2 | A | DCB has discussed on two occasions and a paper will be presented to Growth Directors on 20/10/22.  Connections will then be made with GMCA, LCR and MDA. |
| **Identification and Alignment of priorities: Rural connectivity plan, Business requirements, Digital Infrastructure Plan review (data refresh)** | | |  |  |
|  | Gap analysis assessment for digital connectivity in the sub region | Q2 | G | DCB has discussed a consultants’ brief to develop further our understanding of the barriers to digital uptake; infrastructure, skills, motivation, affordability. This will build on the digital skills report and surveys by the Pledge and be commissioned in Q3. |
|  | Recommendation to the Strategy Programme Board for Growing Places Fund for priority business case areas to support | Q3 | G | Connecting Cheshire is preparing an investment prospectus for discussion by Growth directors on 20/10/22.  DCB identified a potential pilot of satellite technology to reach remote areas (as a possible viable alternative to fixed line). This needs working up into a possible site proposal, with buy-in from the pilot “community” (residents and / or business). |
| **Exploration of commercial models and funding streams: Opportunities and timescales of BDUK, pipeline of public sector “backbone” schemes, identification of “Dig Once” opportunities and levelling up pitch** | | |  |  |
|  | Working with Local Authorities and Connecting Cheshire to develop sub-regional options for Digital Connectivity improvements for levelling up. | Q1 | A | Gain share from the first contract is being deployed. Recent contracts will offer fewer financial opportunities. BDUK procurements are currently underway, and we need to understand level of success and resultant gaps. Connecting Cheshire also provides support to businesses, generally with good success. |
|  | Gain further market support and facilitate engagement on the emerging levelling up proposal for the sub-region on digital connectivity | Q3 | Not started | The SPF applications from the 3 LAs included, at high level, some elements with digital outcomes. Detailed projects still need to be finalised. |
|  | Define pipeline proposal for “backbone” and “dig once” schemes | Q4 | Not started | See above. |
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