

DIGITAL CONNECTIVITY BOARD MEETING

**Minutes of the Cheshire and Warrington Local Enterprise Partnership Digital Connectivity Board
Meeting
held 26th April 2022 at 4.30pm by video conference call**

Present:

Nicola Dunbar (chair)	Calum Lewis	Helen Gopsill	Becky Stuttard (from 5pm)
Richard Bailey (from 5pm)	Connor Diskin (from 5pm)	Charles Jarvis	Stephen Fitzsimmons

In attendance:

Roy Newton	Ian Brooks	Sarah Williams	Philip Cox

Apologies

Rupert Collis	Kathryn Eade	Eleanor Blackburn	Bill Carr

Members of the Public (for Part A)

N/A			
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Agenda Item 1: Apologies and Introductions

1.1 Nicola Dunbar 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 22nd March 2022 and Matters Arising

3.1 The minutes of the meeting held on March 22nd, 2022 were accepted as an accurate record.

3.2 The task and finish group for the Delivery Plan has yet to meet, and a date will be arranged shortly.

ACTION: IB/ND

Agenda Item 4: Public Presentation

4.1 There were no public presentations.

Agenda Item 5: Update on Skills Bootcamps

5.1 SW presented an update regarding the LEP's bid for Skills Bootcamps, in which approximately 80% of training provision will be focussed on digital skills in some way. The original timeline for a decision from DfE has slipped by several weeks. Although our initial bid was regarded positively, DfE's funding has since been clarified following which we were asked to submit a revised proposal amounting to 50% of the previous estimated cost.

5.2 To achieve this reduction, all the bootcamps were assessed using principles that would continue to focus on employer needs but also simplify the delivery of the programme. Consolidation of some bootcamps coupled with deferment of others means a programme of 15 bootcamps, covering ca. 280 learners has been submitted. We anticipate a formal grant offer within a few weeks.

5.3 In anticipation an implementation team has been established which has prepared a project plan and begun to develop the processes and documentation that the programme will necessitate.

5.4 DfE have indicated that further rounds of bootcamp funding might become available later in the year, and demonstrable delivery of this early phase will be crucial to accessing additional funding in future.

5.5 SF mentioned that the Warrington chamber had a digital creative sub-group which had reported the challenges of recruiting staff. He also mentioned that, if future funds become available, the shortages in logistics remain acute.

5.6 HG suggested we raise awareness via the Growth Hub to businesses which had expressed skills shortages.

5.7 In response to CL's query about what is considered a "digital skill", SW provided the eligible course areas as set out by DfE in the prospectus.

5.8 CJ offered to identify and refer businesses to SW from those that had or are receiving training from Cheshire East.

ACTION: CJ

Agenda Item 6: Review of Sub-Regional Governance of Digital

6.1 IB introduced a draft paper that is being prepared for Growth Directors which examines the governance arrangements for digital projects across the sub-region and begins to address ways to improve co-ordination between strategic aims and operational delivery. The DCB is one of the existing structures within that framework and members were asked to comment on the paper.

6.2 HG felt that the DCB might lack detailed knowledge of specific technologies but could valuably contribute in ways that assisted clarity of accountability, objective decision making, engaging with the "right groups" and in monitoring results.

6.3 PC suggested that digital went with the grain of a possible future County Deal and required a shared sub-regional agenda with co-ordinated decisions about infrastructure and skills. RN advised that if form follows function, it is important to determine what should be done at a sub-regional level and what is best done at local level.

6.4 It was agreed that governance would be improved by developing some clearer arrangements with elected member forum. CJ confirmed that he had obtained full council support for the use of gain share. IB commented that many of the case studies described by fibre providers were initiated by the

public sector connecting its assets (public buildings, schools, hospitals, etc) which stimulated further private sector investment.

6.5 BS thought that if business was to stay engaged, it would be important for clear objectives and supporting actions across all bodies within the framework.

6.6 IB/CJ will make adjustments to the paper and feedback after a discussion with Growth Directors.

ACTION: IB/CJ

Agenda Item 7 : Board Discussion Forum

7.1 A discussion was held to gather thoughts for the upcoming board discussion forum on June 15th, which IB will collate into an agenda and framework to assist facilitating the session (which will be in person).

ACTION: IB

7.2 Questions we could pose to the board are:

- What are our objectives?
- Who are we “doing this for”? – residents, businesses
- What criteria we might employ to prioritise infrastructure investment?
- How do we encourage people to adopt and adapt to use the digital infrastructure provided?
- What type of conversations should we be having? Transformative?
- How do we raise awareness to the power of digital to change ways of working?
- How do we raise awareness more generally?
- How do we overcome the limitations of our resources to develop digital?
- What “power” do we have – financial, networks, communities, planning conditions?

Agenda Item 8: Any Other Business

8.1 IB presented a verbal report on his attendance at Connected North 2022. The conference focussed on the two strands of infrastructure (Day 1) and inclusion (Day 2). IB had attended Day 1 only.

8.2 Gigabit fibre coverage is now estimated to have 35% national coverage. BT Openreach is seeking to add 3.5-4 Million per year in 2022-2026 to raise the figure to 26 Million. Cityfibre, a neutral fibre provider, targets and has presence in 60 smaller Cities, of which in 47 they have public sector contracts e.g. to serve Social Housing. BDUK target 85% coverage by 2025, and estimate 900,000 properties will need subsidy, of which 150,000 procured.

8.3 Key challenges facing the delivery targets are

- Covid (on-going issues if absence and delays)
- Cost of Living Crisis
- Vacancies and Skills
- Supply chain
- Lack of diversity in the industry
- Planning consents and obtaining wayleaves (especially for 4G/5G) – some legislative change pending

8.4 Capability of users varies regionally. Southeast has estimated 21% classed as limited internet users, which rises to 38% in Northeast. West Yorkshire has 4% completely digitally “disconnected” and 25% of population lack any digital skills. Recognition that Universal Credit is 100% online, but 35% of claimants have poor digital skills. Investment is not being structured to the extent necessary to ensure communities are not left behind.

8.5 Manchester claimed to be the fastest growing tech city in Europe, with a strong link to green jobs.

8.6 The thing that characterises Smart Cities and Smart Industries is their ability to support decision making with data, information and evidence. Digital can help show how, where and when resources are being used potentially identifying issues not previously considered, prompting decision making and policy change. There is recognition that no two places are the same, so no silver bullets or single templates. There can be some replication, but systems will need to be adjusted locally. A potential component of smart cities is smart homes, enabling e.g., monitoring of patients and those in need of care at home, delivery of services within the home environment.

Date and Time of Next Meetings

May 24th, 2022 4.30-6.30pm via MS Teams