

Introduction

This has been a particularly hectic three months, which amongst other things has included the grant submission of BDUK bid; progression towards developing a city wide 4G network, ongoing project activity as well as leading and developing a number of European funding bids. Our recent positioning within the Development Directorate is enabling us to influence the strategic direction of the City and LEP as we continue to work to maintain Birmingham's digital leadership.

We continue to support the three city Council priorities along the key areas of Employment and Education and Skills; Clean and Safe City and Protecting Vulnerable People and recognise that major benefits will only be achieved if our digital programme is integrated into the mainstream city initiatives in a cross sector approach which we are actively progressing with key partners. We are providing strategic input into the City Council's Executive Management Team away day to support Birmingham's ambition to become a global smart city. As part of this we are bringing together organisations into a marketplace to showcase the some of the innovative technology solutions and applications for enhancing services.

We have strengthened our relationship with European Commission officers who are actively supporting the City to moving our projects and activities forward.

Below is a summary of the **key developments and activities** that have taken place in this quarter.

1. Employment, Education and Skills

- We are continuing to build the case for ultra-fast broadband infrastructure with connectivity 100+ Mbps each way through our [digital districts](#) project encompassing Digbeth/Eastside/Jewellery Quarter area. A recent grant submission to BDUK has been well received and although we were not selected for the next round, they have offered further support to develop our proposals. We are also actively engaged in discussing this agenda with the EU Commission as part of the Digital 2020 Agenda. The District will act as a catalyst in encouraging growth in specific business sectors. It will also create a template for extension of such resources elsewhere in the city and is being embedded in the Economic Growth Strategy for the Birmingham and Solihull LEP.
- Work is ongoing in exploring the opportunities presented by emerging wireless technologies. The high level benefits made possible by 4G connectivity are extremely appealing to the City with promises of cost efficiencies, carbon reduction and an income stream amongst them. Digital Birmingham are looking at partnership approach to fourth Generation (4G) mobile connectivity linking the city assets of tower blocks and street lights to external investment in next generation wireless.
- Following on from the presentation at the March Board meeting by Chamber of Commerce, DB have had further discussions with the Chamber as well as Marketing Birmingham to look at how we can support and work collaboratively to accelerate the skills development of businesses and grow a capable and skilled workforce that will help address the digital divide and increase the city's digital capabilities as a driver for inward investment.

2. Sustainability and Climate Change

- The web conferencing trial ([Webex](#)), which has raised awareness of how this tool can help to reduce officer travel, costs and CO₂ is due to come to a close end of June. Following which, a report on the findings with recommendations will be presented to the Deputy Leader and be instrumental in building the wider business case for the city. We are in discussion with Service Birmingham to look at how we can support current participants keen to continue with Webex whilst a city wide solution can be explored.
- DB led the development of an Open data policy, which sets a framework for decisions on publishing data online held by Birmingham City Council and this was agreed at last month's Corporate Management Team meeting. This policy will now be developed into a strategic action plan, which will enable a proactive coordinated approach to the publication of data sets and their use. We are already demonstrating the value of open data by creating new applications to support City outcomes such as the **Birmingham Civic Dashboard**. The open data movement, although still in its infancy, already offers great opportunities for citizens, developers and civic entrepreneurs to look with new eyes at public services to identify improvements and design new approaches.
- Phase 3 of the [DEHEMS Smart Metering Project](#) finished end of April. An evaluation report is being produced and findings from the project are helping to inform and support other bid submissions and environmental project work.

3. Digital Participation and Engagement – Protecting the Vulnerable

- DB has been meeting with key stakeholders within Adults & Communities, Voluntary Sector, GP Consortia, UHB, PCT Cluster, technology providers to develop our programme priorities around Independent Living and the wider concept of the Smart Home that exploits the use of digital technologies to address individual's lifestyles, wellness and quality of life and look at new models of care. This is an important agenda for the city in its priorities around prevention and enablement and providing better health and social care for people as they age..
- In responding to the EU Call "Developing Digital Skills and Competencies for Carers", DB supported by Birmingham Carers Centre organised workshops to understand carers current use of technology and how it can better support them in their caring role. It identified that carers have very limited digital skills due to existing constraints such as time, resources, age and capacity and have not always been in a position to exploit technologies for their mutual benefit. Carers in Birmingham account for 10% of its population with 25% (25,327) providing over 50 hours of unpaid care. Digital technologies can provide a vital gateway to much needed information, advice, support and social interaction as well as enhancing IT skills for enhancing employability opportunities. As a result of this work, DB are in a better position to influence the City Council's Commissioning Strategy for Carers, which is being updated.
- DB attended [ND11 conference](#) 'Building a Networked Nation Day' which included a 'Healthy Communities' themed strand led by the Deputy Leader, Cllr Paul Tilsley. This looked at the social & economic barriers to achieving fully networked communities & explored innovative technology approaches to support the needs of the most vulnerable. As part of this DB have committed their support to the national campaign 'Race Online 2012' and are part of their active network of local authorities to share and establish priorities for action.

4. Raising the Profile of Birmingham

- **Awards** - The innovative "[Keeping IT in the Family](#)" initiative was named as the winner of the prestigious European Award of Excellence "City for Children" during a ceremony in Stuttgart. With submissions received from over 20 countries, this award recognises the success of Birmingham's unique approach to this project and the range and diversity of the activities of the Digital Birmingham Team.
- **Events** - We organised a highly successful [Kindle Camp](#) workshop focused on how to create and publish content for the Kindle e-book. As a result DB along with the Library of Birmingham are now producing a new course called "e-book in a day: Kindle publishing for beginners" to help support people make the transition to this medium.

5. Funding Opportunities

- We are accessing EU/national funding sources to allow the Council to carry out innovative digital activities leading to further service improvement in infrastructure, sustainability and assistive technologies. Considerable activity has been spent on the progression of EU bids, both as a partner and lead co-ordinator. The bids covered areas that ranged from supporting some of the most vulnerable in our communities by developing digital skills of carers (DISCOVER); applying pervasive technologies and multimedia experiences to enhance the visitor experience through to integrating health and assistance services to the elderly with a focus on the My Care in Birmingham portal and Smart Spaces which will test and develop energy awareness and monitoring services in City buildings. We are also looking at how we can exploit and use these proposals / concepts to attract funding via other means.

6. Looking forward July - Sept

We will continue to work closely with key partners to maximise areas of value and opportunities and with the Board to shape the strategic focus of our Business Plan which is currently in development. Key activities will centre on:

- Responding to the Technology Strategy Board [DALLAS](#) call which is looking to invest up to £23 million in establishing 5 testbeds locations to demonstrate how independent living can help support older people and their lifestyles – our aim is to see Birmingham and region as a test bed which will be key to driving innovation and market development.
- Identify opportunities for expanding the Digital Districts Programme across the Enterprise Zones and progressing the submission of the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) grant bid for phase 1 of the programme.
- Working towards the creation of a business case for establishing a 4G network across the City
- Working with neighbouring LEPs to explore the opportunities of establishing public sector networks to drive efficiencies in delivering public services.
- Establishing a strong events programme that will enable us to both profile Birmingham as a digital city but also enable us to share best practice with other leading digital cities.
- DB are hosting the [Local Gov Camp](#) which brings together some of the most innovative and forward thinking people in and around local government to share learning and practice and debate around common issues.
- Later this month we are presenting at the [20th EBN Congress](#) in Toulon on innovation and collaboration and speaking at the [Digital Assembly](#) in Brussels to seek support and highlight challenges for urban cities in the development of ultra fast digital networks.