



## **LEP – Sub Committee**

### **LEP - Lancashire Innovation Board**

**Private and Confidential: NO**

**Date:** Monday, 15 November 2021

### **Innovation Observatory Progress Report** (Appendix A refers)

**Report Author: Matt Wright,**  
**Matthew.Wright@lancashirelep.co.uk**

#### **Executive Summary**

A presentation will be delivered to the Board on a database and mapping function for our clusters that has been created internally by the LEP and an update on the proposed target audience, the brief and development method and timescales for a web site building on work to date.

#### **Recommendations**

1. The views of the Board are requested in relation to the presentation and report on progress with planning the content for a web platform for the Innovation Board.
2. To approve the next stages to commission a prototype web platform that stakeholders can test and refine.

#### **Background and Advice**

The Innovation Board in previous meetings gave approval for officers to plan and develop a web site (termed an Observatory) which would enable stakeholders to have improved visibility and navigation of innovative clusters of businesses and assets and encourage collaboration around missions and challenges.

This would promote what Lancashire has to offer, provide for a much more systematic level of engagement and enable the Board to highlight and regularly feed in relevant opportunities and funding sources around which innovative organisations can further cluster, encouraging increased R&D

Stakeholders, mainly from the public sector, needing to understand, plan and optimise the delivery of innovation support and engage with businesses around



opportunities have not had a comprehensive and detailed picture of the clusters of innovative businesses in the county.

Ensuring that the many challenges and funding opportunities (such as those from IUK) were directed to relevant businesses and that partnership contacts were initiated, continues to be piecemeal and not sufficiently timely. Given the geographical spread of the county and the relatively small innovation team coordinating activity, it was identified that a database and mapping function would be a first step in addressing this problem.

It was also identified that additional tools could be relatively easily added to a web platform such as a feed of IUK and other Govt opportunities so that this information could be aligned to relevant clusters and the right connections explored and curated by those wishing to support innovation in the county. This was envisaged as a first step to enhance connectivity and lead to further face to face activity through our wider network but not as a substitute for expert connector relationships.

With such a web site established for primary stakeholder use it was also identified that it would raise visibility and promotion of the county and that other permissions could be provided. For example businesses would be able to interrogate the site should they wish to do so or when involved in partnership discussions/social media connections and other stakeholders could also have visibility of what Lancashire has to offer. This could provide additional functionality to support downstream networking activities, events and enhance collaboration.

Research and consultation, principally through a piece of work commissioned from FutureGov by Lancashire County Council into the wider innovation needs of stakeholders, highlighted a number of key issues:

- There was a primary need amongst the business support organisations for improved visibility of clusters and opportunities
- This would need to be tested with a simple prototype and then other functions added on the basis of further testing with secondary stakeholders
- There would need to be clear identification of those responsible for keeping it up to date and it should be part of a wider client journey/engagement process

On the basis of the work done to date the LEP tasked an intern from Lancaster University with creating a database and mapping function and a working group comprising officers from both the LEP and County Council is meeting fortnightly to progress the brief for a Lancashire based web developer who can develop a site in two phases.

The first phase will build on the activity by the working group and create a prototype or beta site for stakeholders to test and refine while a second phase will develop additional functionality based on these trials. The budget for this work is less than £10,000 and already allocated from LCDL funding with delivery in this financial year. The target is to launch the prototype site in January/February 2022.



### List of Background Papers

Paper	Date	Contact/Tel
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N/A

Reason for inclusion in Part II, if appropriate

N/A