

Norfolk and Suffolk Council for Digital Tech - Minutes**Chair:** Neil Miles**Date:** Thursday 24th March 2022 **Time:** 14:00–16:00

Via Teams

Attendees	
Neil Miles, Inawisdom (chair) Peter Brady, Orbital Media Chris Sargisson, Norfolk Chamber Thea Goodluck, Tech Nation James Allen, New Anglia LEP Katie Snell, New Anglia LEP Andy Walker, Suffolk Chamber Darryl Newport, University of Suffolk	Julian Munson, New Anglia LEP Gurpreet Jagpal, University of Suffolk Sarah Steed, Norwich University of the Arts Tim Robinson, Tech East Charlie Wright, Epos Now Jai Raithatha, Suffolk County Council Ellen Tilney, Norwich City Council Anette Gilham, Ipswich Borough Council
Apologies	
Marlon Bowser, HTK John Dugmore, Suffolk Chamber Dominic Keen, Britbots Fiona Lettice, UEA Roberta Willner, Norfolk County Council Catherine Richards, New Anglia Colleges Group	Chris Starkie, New Anglia LEP James Duez, Rainbird Dean Withey, Ubisend Lisa Perkins, BT John Nicholson, West Suffolk College
Welcome (Neil Miles)	
Neil Miles welcomed everyone to the meeting and noted apologies received.	
Chair success planning (Julian Munson)	
Neil Miles has been in the chair position now for three years. Julian formally acknowledged his hard work in establishing the Industry Council and supporting the region's work during this period. We have received one formal nomination to become Chair of the Council for Digital Tech and that is Peter Brady. This was seconded and formally approved.	
Workstream progress updates (Julian Munson & Chris Sargisson)	

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Connected Innovation (Julian Munson)

- The Connected Innovation Network is a joined-up offer and programme of activity which has stimulated collaboration and innovation across our innovation centres and assets.
- The project to date has delivered capability mapping of the innovation hubs, also mapping against the seven technology families identified in Government's Innovation Strategy; the Peer Network meets bi-monthly; headline events have been delivered to date around clean growth and emerging technologies, with individual hub events starting to take place; the tech suite has been installed at Hethel Innovation; and film and case study content has been captured across the hubs.
- Strong connections have been made to date across the network and linking in external organisations such as Innovate UK EDGE and the catapult network.
- The innovation and inward investment campaign under the Norfolk & Suffolk Unlimited branding has now gone live with promotional material across social media.
- There will be challenge-led 'hack' events around offshore wind, healthcare, and advanced manufacturing and engineering.
- The network is ever-growing, with new hubs being added regularly to reflect the exciting nature of the fast-growing innovation ecosystem.

Tim Robinson:

- Now at the midway point in the programme. Building blocks are in place. Has been really struck with how keen all the innovation hubs have been to engage with the network. Really keen to drill down into industry-specific challenges and support cross-sector innovation in the region.

Digital Skills Taskforce (Chris Sargisson)

- Met at the end of January to reboot the Digital Skills Taskforce. The group had been paused for various reasons. Intention is to make it more industry-led and focussed moving forward.
- Held a positive discussion with lots of takeaway points.
- The Taskforce will prioritise business needs against reduced labour pool (seen across the board). The group needs to be action focused.
- Active and broad range of skills opportunities and initiatives. Need to encourage engagement with this. What are the challenges with businesses picking these opportunities up?
- The next meeting is on 6th April and will move forward with clearer outputs and measured indications of success and activity.

Tim Robinson:

- The Taskforce has set up a task and finish group around skills bootcamps. Digital bootcamps will be a key theme. Waiting to hear whether we have a green light to move forward with procurement exercise. Got some useful evidence from industry around business needs.

Sarah Steed:

- There has not been a rise nationally for computer science applications. Therefore, there is still a job to do to get the message across to schools to get the message out.

Cyber security & FinTech updates (Katie Snell)

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- Cyber event taking place on 28th April with a range of fantastic speakers in the pipeline. A lot more cyber-attacks have been seen since the start of the war in Ukraine. Speakers include EDF Energy and Amazon Web Services, with more to be confirmed. We will be promoting this event very soon.
- On FinTech, we are working closely with the financial services groups FIG (Norwich) and FIPS (Ipswich) to look at FinTech opportunities for the region. Taking a step back first to explore what the capabilities are within the region with industry and how best we should be moving forward. In terms of the next steps will work out who needs to be part of the initial meeting. Do get in touch with suggestions for the working group.

Road to Net Zero Programme (Darryl Newport)

- UEA and University of Suffolk are pulling together this work for the Road to Net Zero programme, funded by New Anglia LEP through the Community Renewal Fund.
- Evidence-mapping the sectoral opportunities and challenges. Understanding actions taken by businesses and challenges businesses are facing to decarbonisation in the region.
- Three survey areas – focus groups, questionnaire, and interview survey. Survey is completely anonymised – can get questions out over email from Darryl.
- Road To Net Zero -Focus Group Questions:
 - Interested for you to reflect on actions that you as a business have taken to reduce the pace of climate change, developed decarbonisation process. (Nonspecific actions and sector specific actions).
 - And now, thinking of the actions that you have taken, please reflect on the challenges that you faced. (Nonspecific challenges and sector specific challenges).
- Output will be a comms strategy to set out benefits of decarbonisation and challenges businesses might face.
- Pilot project. Hoping to put in a much-larger bid for activity moving forward.
- Earth Day – 22 April – Net Zero Symposium at University of Suffolk. Businesses talking about product opportunities and journey to net zero.

Roundtable Updates

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Tim Robinson:

- Biggest topic of conversation is around recruitment. Upward pressure on salaries. Size of talent pool. Rapid digitisation of multiple sectors means more organisations competing for talent pool.
- Hot house earlier this week at DigiTech centre – how can businesses engage in partnership with these projects. Businesses need to take part, can't just sit back.
- Early-stage businesses facing challenges with access to early-stage capital. We have Anglia Capital Group; Angels@Essex and others in Cambridge, but need more investors.
- Seeing a lot of success still. More businesses prospering, rather than struggling.

Neil Miles:

- Agree skills is our biggest challenge. People can earn London salaries without having to travel into London. Starting to see return to work post-covid. Transition and hybrid working – businesses are finding their feet in this new way of working.
- Some issues around cost of doing business.
- Inawisdom is growing and scaling.
- Inacademy – bring in graduates and develop/train them on the job with industry standards.
- SMEs are very busy. Struggle with time. But need to invest time around skills/development.

Charlie Wright:

- Worried about the recruitment drive. Only way to scale quickly is to open doors to entry level talent. Looking at graduate brand over next 6-8 months and attracting talent. Cost of living crisis – had a lot of people leave for higher paid jobs.
- What are we doing publicly to attract people to the region?
- Trying to work with UEA and the Norwich Business School. University of Suffolk too.
- Moving in a great direction.
- FinTech space is where they are moving into – now doing embedded payments. Embedded finance is their goal. Started lending facility and structured repayment plans. Finding talent that understands banking is a challenge in the region – looking at other regions and abroad for this talent.
- Launched sustainability programme for restaurant customers. Plant a tree for every meal that goes through the restaurants.

Gurpreet Jagpal:

- Challenge on talent pipeline is a big issue. Upskilling on top of young talent coming through. Attracting and retaining talent is one of the biggest challenges for businesses. Managing hybrid way of working full time will be interesting.

Chris Sargisson:

- Multiple activities going on to try and solve these challenges. Entities across the board and interventions from partners.
- No silver bullet to address this issue. See it across sectors. Solutions have to be business-led. Businesses listen to businesses. Need to use collateral to promote this knowledge, insight, etc.
- Business collateral is crucial. Needs to be constantly refreshed.

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Julian Munson:

- Increasingly our conversations around 'inward investment' and attracting businesses to the region are shifting focus to be more about attracting (and retaining) talent. This Council can perhaps take an action to look at developing more of a plan around promoting our narrative/messages via multiple channels/platforms.

Darryl Newport:

- DigiTech centre on Adastral Park is an academic campus on an industrial campus – lots of opportunities for digital tech businesses to take advantage of these opportunities moving forward.

Jai Raithatha:

- How do we get messages out on national stage and in trade magazines?
- Should be looking at bigger picture promotion – tech editors for national newspapers should be used more rather than simply locals.

Peter Brady:

- Blessed with fantastic businesses, fantastic activity, and support in the region. Always a case of building on what we have and building outwards.
- Generate more AI patents in this region than elsewhere in Europe. Should be singing from the rooftops nationally and globally.
- AI Festival to be held next year again. Last one received good coverage nationally and internationally.
- Digital health is a major opportunity for this region too.
- The more promotion, the more we can draw investment into the region. Also providing an inspiration story for the next generation.
- Big piece of work needs to be done to get technology and innovation in the hands of children to inspire them. In capacity, really enjoy demonstrating to children. Lot of work to be done to engage with schools and colleges to show what possibilities might be and how students can get involved. Inspiration leads to career path exploration.
- One major problem is that the universities are working very hard to produce graduates. Skills within academic institutions needs to be more on point with what businesses need. Finding that they need to retrain graduates for first 1-2 years.
- We should work with hubs across other regions e.g., those working in cyber space close to GCHQ or robotics in Bristol or gaming in Dundee.

AOB

No additional business.

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