**West Mercia Rural 5G Test Bed – Industry Call for Life Sciences Sector Innovators**

West Mercia Rural 5G project will soon be launching a campaign to recruit UK tech / industry partners to work with existing partners to design, deliver, test and evaluate, innovative 5G enabled ‘digital health and assistive technology’ use cases that support the delivery of health and social care in rural areas. The campaign will be managed through the West Midlands Academic Health Science Networks (WMAHSNs) Meridian Health Innovation Exchange:

 <https://meridian.wazoku.com/#/community/5906910ba97b42f4be867abde716b3ef/home-page>

This press release is an advance notice of the above-mentioned Meridian Campaign Industry Call for UK Life Sciences sector Innovators, Industry / Tech partners.

**Campaign Timetable**

This campaign will run from the 1st June 2020 to the 15th June 2020.

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| Campaign Launched  | 1200hrs Tuesday 2nd June 2020  |
| Closing date for submissions | 1700hrs Monday 15th June 2020 |
| Clarification Questions from Industry partners received | By 1200hrs Monday 8th June 2020 |
| Information session webinar for Industry Partners | 1200-1400hrs Wednesday 10th June 2020(further information will be shared in due course) |
| Shortlisting of Submissions  | Tuesday 16th June - Friday 19th June 2020 |
| Notify Shortlisted partners | 1700hrs Friday 19th June 2020 |
| Virtual Interviews for Shortlisted  | Thursday 25th June 2020 |
| Preferred Partners(s) notified | 1700hrs Tuesday 30th June 2020  |

Background:

Rural areas of England and Wales are often the poor relations of their urban neighbours when it comes to the roll out of digital infrastructure. Both superfast broadband and mobile services in rural areas still lack the coverage and quality that residents have come to expect across the majority of the population.

Deployment to rural areas is often expensive, technically difficult and so commercially unattractive for network operators. At the same time local authorities (LAs) and Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) in rural areas are facing increasing demands for their services from an aging population at a time when their funding has been under increasing pressure. Maintaining current approaches to service delivery is not sustainable and alternative models are required.

Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sports (DCMS) funded ‘West Mercia Rural 5G’ project through the Testbeds and Trials Programme. The project will focus on the rural area where the two counties of Shropshire and Worcestershire meet. The geography consists of small market towns, smaller rural villages and hamlets as well as isolated scattered properties. The project will explore and seek to overcome two key digital infrastructure challenges faced when deploying digital infrastructure to rural areas and will also address the need for new models of service delivery by LAs and health organisations

1. First, we will test deploying 5G infrastructure in a new way by re-purposing existing telecommunications infrastructure. The intended outcome would be a model that could be replicated across rural areas allowing for lower capital costs and faster deployment time.
2. Second, we will test a range of new digital health and assistive technologies that are being developed, but which rely on much improved connectivity. For example, remote high-quality consultations with medical and social care professionals can lead to rapid assessments of a resident’s needs and the efficient identification of appropriate solutions. At the same time the cost and inconvenience of long distances travelled, often with limited transport links by the resident and professionals can be avoided.

The project was established before the current Covid-19 situation, however the emergence of Covid-19 means the research and development within this project has increasing importance as new models of service delivery are sought.

The West Mercia Rural 5G project is operated as a ‘test and research’ collaboration consortium. The current membership of the consortium partners is:

* Airband
* Herefordshire & Worcestershire CCG representing NHS partners across West Mercia area
* Shropshire County Council
* Three UK
* University of Chester
* University of Worcester
* West Midlands Academic Health Science Network
* Worcestershire County Council

New tech / industry partners recruited through Meridian Campaign will be expected to join the consortium once recruited in order to access the part-funded activities.

Media contact:

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