

COMMUNITY AND ENTERPRISE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting	Wednesday, 1 st May 2019
Report Subject	Digital Connectivity Development
Cabinet Member	Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Interim Cabinet Member for Housing
Report Author	Chief Officer (Planning, Environment and Economy)
Type of Report	Strategic

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The North Wales Economic Ambition Board (NWEAB) have an ambitious vision to improve the economy across North Wales. That vision has previously been approved by Cabinet, and involves objectives to increase access to faster broadband speeds. The Head of Housing and Economy from Wrexham County Borough Council is the senior responsible officer for the regional digital work, with support from officers from each county. This report explains the opportunities and implications of the regional digital work for Flintshire County Council.

The report provides an update on the digital work carried out to date by NWEAB, in particular, the development of the Digital Connectivity Strategy for the region. The report also provides an update on the Local Full Fibre Network (LFFN) project being developed to secure funding from UK Government's Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1	That Members review the progress made in creating and implementing an ambitious programme for digital connectivity in North Wales.
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REPORT DETAILS

1.00	EXPLAINING THE NORTH WALES DIGITAL CONNECTIVITY STRATEGY AND LOCAL FULL FIBRE NETWORK PROGRAMME
1.01	<p>At their March 2018 meeting the NWEAB approved a Digital Connectivity Strategy for the region, which is attached as Appendix 1. The Strategy has been used to inform the bid for funding to the Local Full Fibre Network programme and to inform the proposals for the North Wales Growth Deal.</p>
1.02	<p>In order to support the delivery of the Strategy, the NWEAB also agreed at the March meeting to develop and submit a regional bid to the UK Government's LFFN Programme Challenge Fund. The Fund is only for investment in digital connectivity delivered by the public sector. It was proposed and agreed that Denbighshire County Council (DCC) would be the lead authority for the purposes of the LFFN bid, with a senior officer from Wrexham County Borough Council continuing to provide the overall senior responsible officer role.</p>
1.03	<p>The LFFN bid focusses on upgrading public sector connectivity by replacing current copper (slow / low and relatively expensive bandwidth) connections with better value, faster 'full fibre' connections at around 400 sites across the region. Among the direct public sector beneficiaries will be the Local Authorities, Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board, North Wales Fire and Rescue and GP surgeries.</p> <p>The public sector upgrades will be delivered via the well-established Welsh public sector procurement framework known as PSBA (Public Sector Broadband Aggregation), with BT providing the service to the sites.</p> <p>Surrounding residential and business properties will benefit from the investment in the fibre network. How will they benefit? Wider availability of full fibre broadband to the private sector will result from the investment in the public sector sites and UK Department for Culture Media and Sport considers that those within 50m of the 'target' site (e.g. a library) to be within reach of this positive impact, with this potentially extending to 200m depending on local network design.</p> <p>The outcome of the £13m investment will be an almost complete coverage of full fibre connectivity across the public sector in North Wales, making it one of the best connected in the UK.</p>
1.04	<p>An application has been submitted and in-principle approval has been received subject to a series of detailed tests being met. The LFFN proposal currently stands at £9 million worth of investment in the region.</p>
1.05	<p>Delivery of full fibre broadband on the proposed scale will result in more of the region's businesses accessing affordable, high quality connectivity, typically only available in larger urban centres. This will facilitate not only the growth of digital industries which support highly skilled, well paid jobs but also most other sectors which are increasingly dependent on higher standards of connectivity. These include tourism, manufacturing and retail. Extensive consultation with businesses with the support of the North Wales and Mersey Dee Business Council, on behalf of the NWEAB, has identified</p>

	digital connectivity of this type as a consistent priority.
1.06	Around a third of the public sector sites to be upgraded are associated with health board sites and around 100 of these are GP surgeries, sometimes in very rural communities. Both UK and Welsh Governments have identified a need for greater adoption of digital technology in healthcare. The current lack of full fibre connectivity to these sites is restricting the innovation and efficiencies being achieved elsewhere in better connected regions, with routine tasks such as transferring patient records relying upon inefficient and slow technologies.
1.07	Further proposals for improving digital connectivity across North Wales, informed by the Strategy, have been included in the North Wales Growth Deal programme currently being negotiated with UK and Welsh Governments. The details of proposed activity is still to be fully determined and will depend on the final level of resources available for this work stream. It is anticipated that the work stream will include measures to: improve digital connectivity to strategic employment sites and along major transport corridors and to increase domestic access to higher speed broadband (building upon the Welsh Government Superfast Cymru 2 programme).
1.08	The regional officers group is working closely with Welsh Government officials to ensure that proposals build upon and add value to wider programmes including Superfast Cymru 2 and improvements to mobile telephone infrastructure. Other funding opportunities will be sought to expand the fibre infrastructure of the region and the County, or to support business and households in connecting to it.

2.00	RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS
2.01	The increased connectivity to Council properties through the LFFN programme will create opportunities to improve services through future-proofed technology. There is a capital cost of approximately £33,000 associated with upgrading equipment in Council premises to take advantage of the improved connectivity and an associated annual increased revenue cost of £9,500 per annum. There will be the requirement for Flintshire's IT team to configure and install this equipment to take advantage of the increased connectivity. This will form part of the action plan associated with the delivery of the Council's Digital Strategy under the Business and Community work stream.

3.00	CONSULTATIONS REQUIRED / CARRIED OUT
3.01	Consultation has been undertaken throughout the course of 2018 by the NWEAB with; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each of the other North Wales Local Authorities (ICT and Economic

	<p>Development)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welsh Government (ICT Infrastructure Division) • UK Government (Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport) • North Wales Economic Ambition Board • Betsi Cadwalader University Health Board (NHS) • National Wales Informatics Service (NHS) • North Wales and Mersey Dee Business Council • Federation of Small Businesses <p>The outcome of this consultation has included the North Wales Digital Connectivity Strategy (Appendix 1), a Digital Connectivity Action Plan for the NWEAB Growth Bid and the proposed North Wales Local Full Fibre Network Programme application.</p>
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4.00	RISK MANAGEMENT
4.01	There are no risks foreseen in the Council adopting the North Wales Connectivity Strategy. The Strategy should be reviewed periodically to ensure it remains relevant.
4.02	The risks associated with procuring new telecommunications duct networks in key economic sites in the County involve potential for disruption to the highways at the target sites which will be minimised as far as practicable.

5.00	APPENDICES
5.01	Appendix 1 North Wales Digital Connectivity Strategy

6.00	LIST OF ACCESSIBLE BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS
6.01	<p>None</p> <p>Contact Officer: Niall Waller Telephone: 01352 702137 E-mail: niall.waller@flintshire.gov.uk</p>

7.00	GLOSSARY OF TERMS
7.01	<p>Local Full Fibre Network (LFFN) – a challenge programme funded by the UK Government Department for Culture Media and Sport to increase fibre connectivity in the UK.</p> <p>North Wales Economic Ambition Board (NWEAB) – a statutory Joint Committee tasked with delivering economic growth.</p> <p>PSBA (Public Sector Broadband Aggregation) – a Welsh Government</p>

framework for high speed fibre connectivity to public buildings.

Superfast Cymru 2 Programme – a Welsh Government programme to increase the availability of faster broadband speeds to domestic premises. Delivered by BT Openreach using, in most cases, existing copper telephone infrastructure.