

## Urgent Decision Taken on Behalf of Cabinet

### Report to the Leader of the Council

### Report of the Head of Business Growth and Innovation

<b>Part I</b>
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Electoral Division affected: None;
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### Government Consultation - Gigabit Programme Planning

(Appendices 'A' - 'B' refer)

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#### Executive Summary

The report sets out the context and the detail of the Government's first consultation on the planning and delivery of the national Gigabit connectivity programme.

#### Reason for Urgency

This decision is urgent and cannot await the next meeting of Cabinet on 4 February 2021. The reason for this is due to the need for the county to submit a response to the Government's Gigabit consultation by 29th January 2021.

#### Recommendation

The Leader of the County Council is asked to:

- i) Note the contents of the report.
- ii) Approve the county council's response to the Gigabit Programme planning consultation including the additional comments detailed in the report, and
- iii) Authorise the Director of Growth, Environment and Planning, in conjunction with the Chief Digital Officer, to submit this response and, following consultation with the Leader of the County Council, responses to any further Building Digital UK technical consultations on the Gigabit programme.

The required decisions are designated as urgent for the purposes of Standing Order C29 due to the need for the county to submit a response to the Government's Gigabit consultation by 29th January 2021. Therefore the decisions can be implemented immediately without waiting for three working days under Standing Order C28 (3).

## Background and Advice

The government Gigabit initiative is a national £5bn programme to target at least 85% of premises with Gigabit capable (1000mbps)/Full Fibre connectivity by 2025. The Government is committed to a vision of a digitally connected Britain, offering the fastest and most reliable speeds available.

Gigabit-capable/Full Fibre connectivity is the next step from the previous Superfast Broadband (30+mbps) programme and will future proof connections through improved resilience and higher capacity/speeds for residents and businesses alike. The public intervention is planned to focus on the mainly rural 20% hardest to reach properties and will be delivered through a Government funded 'Outside In' programme that will complement commercial plans. The delivery of this programme will be managed directly by Building Digital UK with procurement starting in Spring/Summer 2021.

## Superfast Lancashire Programme

The county council has delivered two contracts with BT/Openreach to deploy Superfast Broadband (30mbps+) to over 146,000 premises in Lancashire. The Government's ambition was to provide 97% coverage. This was achieved in the county council and LEP areas through a £30m+ publically funded programme, complementing commercial investment. The current position in Lancashire is as follows:

	Coverage 30mbps	% Coverage under 10mbps	% Coverage min 100mbps	% Gigabit Capable	% popn rural
England	97.15	0.97	66.53	36.51	21
Lancashire	97.6	0.77	58.97	23.33	26
Lancashire LEP	99.68	0.32	78.70	6.73	5
Burnley	99.1	0.37	85.56	85.11	5
Chorley	97.78	0.50	66.6	12.81	31
Fylde	97.27	0.55	47	5.92	22
Hyndburn	98.9	0.35	74.34	7.18	10
Lancaster	98.63	0.64	56.26	21.82	30
Pendle	97.13	1.44	56.03	55.19	26
Preston	98.85	0.52	77.68	7.36	6
Ribble Valley	92.56	3.27	24.48	23.01	93
Rosendale	96.08	0.33	56.58	1.07	5
South Ribble	98.28	0.31	73.52	5.97	2
West Lancashire	96.26	1.30	42.97	31.59	33
Wyre	97.9	0.47	31.51	29.84	53

Table 1 Thinkbroadband.com

As can be seen from Table 1, Lancashire's (County and LEP) Superfast coverage is above the national average with Ribble Valley, West Lancashire and Rosendale falling below. It is estimated that there are at least 8,000 rural properties in the Lancashire LEP area without access to at least Superfast connectivity. Detail on the non-Superfast rural postcodes in Lancashire can be accessed via an interactive map - [Lancashire LEP Area Rural Superfast Broadband Not Spots](#)

Although Superfast coverage is good 100mbps coverage is less positive with a number of districts below the England average. Lancashire's position is significantly worse when it comes to Gigabit coverage. This is partly due to rural and topographic nature of Lancashire making the delivery of Gigabit infrastructure technically complex and expensive.

### **Gigabit/'Outside In' Context**

Building Digital UK launched a consultation on 22 December 2020, concerning the Government's initial planning for the 'Outside In' programme. The 'Outside In' programme will focus on the hard to reach areas in England. The consultation asks a series of questions regarding the geographic and delivery information contained in the consultation. The initial deadline for submitting a response was 22 January 2021, Building Digital UK have allowed a short extension to 29 January 2021 in order for Lancashire to clarify a number of points and respond.

The priorities for the 'Outside In' programme are:

- Properties without Superfast connectivity (less than 30mbps)
- Build efficiency for private sector deliverers, i.e. delivery in those places most straightforward and financially efficient for the private sector
- Properties to be delivered by commercial activity in 'due course'

The focus on properties without Superfast connectivity is to be welcomed, although those properties are likely to be in places that are not as straightforward and financially efficient to build to as others (otherwise they would have been built to or already be included in commercial plans).

The programme will utilise Unique Property Registration Numbers (UPRNs) instead of postcodes, unlike the Superfast programme, so that properties to be delivered to will be identified at the outset of any delivery. This will give certainty to the properties selected and identify early on those properties for which an alternative solution will be required. The consultation suggests that Lancashire will receive Gigabit coverage mainly through commercial activity which is in line with previous Superfast delivery.

The consultation also refers to the Gigabit Voucher programme, whereby residents and businesses in rural areas can apply for funding towards the cost of installing gigabit-capable broadband when part of a group scheme. Rural premises with broadband speeds of less than 100Mbps can use vouchers worth £1,500 per home and up to £3,500 for each small to medium-sized business. So far in Lancashire £1.1m of Gigabit vouchers have been accessed, mainly supporting community fibre approaches where a commercial provider requires an additional contribution to make the installation of fibre financially worthwhile/efficient. Broadband for the Rural North (BARN) have been particularly active in utilising vouchers.

The next stage of the Gigabit consultation process is due to take place in February/March 2021.

## **Consultation Data/Mapping**

The county council response needs to be placed in the context of the data within the consultation. The consultation contains a map, attached as Appendix 'A' to this report, which proposes public intervention areas. The proposed public intervention areas are based upon gaps in commercial coverage. This is to ensure that public investment is only directed to areas where there is considered to be market failure in that no provider is planning any commercial delivery.

However, at this stage, the commercial coverage in the consultation is indicative. The true nature of commercial delivery, geographic coverage and timescales, will not be known until later in 2021 when an Open Market Review takes place. The Open Market Review, conducted by Building Digital UK, will formally ask commercial providers what their delivery plans for Gigabit infrastructure are for the next 3 to 5 years. In addition, there are already indications that some of the areas suggested by Building Digital UK as being delivered to by commercial providers are not currently in a commercial plan.

As a result any response the county council provides will need to be caveated that if the detail of commercial delivery changes so could the county council's position.

## **Consultation Questions and Draft response**

The consultation questions and draft responses are attached at Appendix 'B'. It is proposed that in addition to the direct responses to the consultation questions the county council's response:

- Welcomes the additional investment to address inequalities in digital connectivity, in support of meeting the Government's Gigabit target as quickly as possible.
- Highlights those communities/areas still without at least Superfast connectivity as priorities for delivery.
- Notes the proposed public and suggested commercial intervention areas and reserves detailed commentary until the specifics of planned commercial coverage are confirmed.
- Recommends that any 'outside in' procurements are tailored to the needs of residents and businesses in the Lancashire so that coverage is comprehensive without further 'not spots'. This could include different size procurements.
- Recommends that the use of Gigabit Vouchers is considered at the outset of any procurements/commercial delivery to ensure that delivery planning is as comprehensive as possible.

## **Consultations**

N/A

## **Implications:**

This item has the following implications, as indicated:

## **Risk management**

There are no significant risks associated with the proposals in this report.

## **List of Background Papers**

Paper	Date	Contact/Tel
Planning for Gigabit Delivery 2021	22 December 2020	Sean McGrath/(01772) 531053

Reason for inclusion in Part II, if appropriate

N/A

**Urgent Decision Taken on behalf of Cabinet: Declarations**

**Leader of the County Council**

**Government Consultation - Gigabit Programme Planning**

Original recommendation, as set out in the report, approved without amendment. Yes/No \*

Original recommendation amended and decision as follows: Yes/No \*

I have a pecuniary/non-pecuniary interest in this matter. Yes/No \*

If an interest is declared please give details below:

.....  
Leader of the County Council

insert date

**Chief Officer**

I certify that this is an appropriate and accurate record within the terms of Standing Order C30(2) and (3) of the decision taken by the Cabinet Member. .....  
insert title of authorising officer

insert date

\*Delete as appropriate