

Digital Connectivity Working Group Update

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Since the last board meeting update in March 2021, the ADEPT Digital Connectivity Working Group has met twice virtually.

Meeting No. 1: The eight local authorities of: Somerset, Buckinghamshire, Gloucestershire, East Sussex, Kent, Nottinghamshire, Shropshire, and Staffordshire were represented at the first meeting in April. The group appointed the new Chair for the Group – Ceren Clulow.

Gareth Elliot from Mobile UK (the trade body for mobile network operators) joined the meeting and shared insights of the recently announced transparency notice for the SRN programme. The publication of the transparency notice means the government can now proceed with grant agreements with the MNOs for more than £500 million that it has committed to reduce 'total not-spots' and ensure good mobile coverage across 95% of the UK.

The ADEPT Digital Connectivity Working Group continues to work closely with the Government's broadband delivery arm - Building Digital UK (BDUK) and welcomes this opportunity to make a positive impact on digital deployment by drawing upon the wide-ranging ideas and experience of different authorities and broadband programmes, highlighting good practice that we can all learn from.

The Group received update from the separately established Task and Finish group which is specifically:

- brokering understanding of the full nature of the work that local authorities have undertaken on making local broadband deployments a success (particularly brokering understanding about the 'under-the-radar' work).
 - Providing open, honest, but constructive feedback to BDUK on key aspect of the development of the new UK Gigabit Programme (including the procurement approach & strategy, the proposed future partnership model etc.)
 - Providing subject matter expertise – especially from a practical day-to-day deployment perspective.
 - Public messaging moving forward regarding project gigabit
 - how do we ensure sub-superfast areas/hard-to reach areas do not become excluded
- DCMS have issued an update on the partial not spot element of the Shared Rural Network programme. O2, Three and Vodafone are currently working on finalising the location of 222 new masts in partial not spot areas, with exact locations to be confirmed by the end of 2021. planning applications will be submitted soon after
 - BDUK's Project Gigabit Delivery Plan – Summer Update, tied to the "Fibre in Water" project announcement
 - Street lamps and bus shelters to help boost 5G roll out in £4 million trial

The T&F Group also continued having further discussions around the cost of supporting the commercial broadband deployment, particularly re streetworks.

The Group also received couple more presentations from:

- a) **LEDNET** (London Environment Directors' Network) about their digital innovation programme that aims to work in collaboration to identify and develop innovative ideas, solutions and opportunities that support environmental and place objectives.
- b) **Speed Up Britain Campaign** about how this could help Local Authorities efficiently deploy the UK's mobile infrastructure.

Meeting No. 2: The meeting in July were attended by North Northampton, Somerset, Herefordshire, Cambridgeshire, Kent, Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire, Shropshire, and Staffordshire.

The group received a presentation from Enterprise M3 Local Enterprise Partnership about their "Gigabit Town & Rural project" – £4.5 million programme to deploy gigabit-capable fibre along an initial route between Guildford and Basingstoke.

Former MP Anna Turley who is also the Chair of Protect and Connect shared details of their campaign which is against the amended Electronic Communications Code (2017) to demand rent from landowners for the mobile masts.

The Digital Connectivity Working group has established greater dialogue with MobileUK to influence rollout of mobile broadband where there is currently market failure. Therefore the group welcomes roundtable discussions with Gareth Elliott as a great opportunity to discuss the barriers to mobile rollout and to seek solutions that will ensure the continued growth in coverage and capacity of the UK's mobile connectivity. Also discussed about the Shared Rural Network Consultation which is a public consultation on additional 4G mobile coverage to be provided in Total-Not-Spot (TNS) target intervention areas.

The group is currently working on refreshing the digital connectivity policy position which is expected to be launched in November.

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