

ADEPT Digital Connectivity Working Group

The Digital Connectivity Working Group met on 21 April, via Zoom. Nine local authorities were represented, along with representation from ADEPT, the Local Government Association (LGA), Buckinghamshire Thames Valley Local Enterprise Partnership and Midlands Connect.

Insights were shared from the LGA. Reference was made to the DfT/HAUC guidance on streetworks published 27th March, but some indications that streetworks have slowed in some places – a combination of differing interpretations of ‘essential works’, and contractors having problems sourcing materials and power. The LGA plans to both share best practice examples and collate concerns from councils to feedback to government.

It was confirmed that the recent LGA submission to DCMS Select Committee inquiry into broadband and the road to 5G emphasised the need to continue to focus on improving 4G mobile coverage in rural areas; role for councils as key partners in rollout checking and challenging on the ground to troubleshoot and ensure value for money; concern about lack of additional government funding for ‘last 20%’ commitment; possible workforce issues post-Brexit.

The Head of Policy and Communications from Mobile UK joined the call. Given his role focuses on mobile coverage and future infrastructure requirements, he gave a presentation which covered four topics: Shared Rural Network (SRN), Planning reform, 5G and health, and Digital Network Resilience.

So successful was the virtual meeting that the Group decided to arrange two further meetings during the beginning and middle May covering the following two items: (1) Planning for recovery - the role of digital connectivity in recovery and, (2) to discuss the work and progress of the Task and Finish Groups work on the Outside In Programme.

Nicola M^cCoy-Brown
Chair, ADEPT Digital Working Group
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