



Association of Directors of
Environment, Economy, Planning & Transport

DIGITAL CONNECTIVITY WORKING GROUP

Terms of reference

May 2021

Background

The Association of Directors of Environment, Economy, Planning and Transport (ADEPT) represents Place Directors from county, unitary and metropolitan authorities, along with Local Enterprise Partnerships and corporate partners drawn from key service sectors. ADEPT members are at the very heart of maximising sustainable growth in communities throughout the UK. We are delivering the projects that are key to unlocking broader economic success and creating more resilient communities, economies, and infrastructure.

DIGITAL CONNECTIVITY WORKING GROUP

Remit

The ADEPT Digital Connectivity Working Group, established in January 2018, is a 'Task and Finish' group focusing on the short to medium term delivery of improved broadband and mobile connectivity at the local level. The Working Group supports the ADEPT Transport and Connectivity Board.

Part of the group's remit is to support the LGA's Digital Connectivity Working Group, which is looking at how to improve digital connectivity for people in non-metropolitan areas.

The Digital Connectivity Working Group has three ambitions:

- Developing an evidence base to engage Government and Ofcom on the discrepancy between mobile coverage data and consumer experience on the ground
- Building our understanding of what will be required at a local level to deliver the Prime Minister's 'full-fibre by 2025' proposal
- Political leadership in supporting areas such as: planning reform, ensuring new build developments incorporate gigabit-capable internet connections, and skills.

In addition to the three ambitions, the Digital Connectivity Working Group will be:

- Reviewing the four different consultation documents published on the DCMS website on 27 August, relating to 5G and mobile broadband
- Eagerly awaiting a further Government announcement which, according to several industry sources, could see an amendment to the full fibre pledge and a shift in language to include a wider range of technologies
- Sharing good practice and developing common solutions, including working with the mobile network operators to respond with real coverage action and establishing how we can collectively engage most effectively with DCMS. This will support our approach to developing the evidence base to engage Government and Ofcom in relation to discrepancies.

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Membership

The Digital Connectivity Working Group's membership is voluntary and is drawn from local digital project leads at member local authorities. It also includes representatives from:

- Local Government Association
- Local Enterprise Partnership
- Midlands Connect

Key personnel are:

- Chair: Ceren Clulow, ceren.clulow@nottsc.gov.uk
- Task and Finish Group Chair: Elizabeth Harrison, liz.harrison@kent.gov.uk

Meetings and other activities

The Digital Connectivity Working Group members are meeting every 6 weeks. All face to face meetings moved to virtual platform due to the pandemic restrictions.

The Government has set challenging targets for digital delivery including full fibre by 2025 and mobile networks coverage by 2026 as part of the former 'Outside In' and 'Shared Rural Networks' programmes.

In support of the Government's challenging targets for digital delivery including full fibre by 2025 and mobile networks coverage by 2026, the Digital Connectivity Working Group has been focusing on:



the Building Digital UK (BDUK)'s objective of delivering world-class digital infrastructure to the remaining twenty per cent (20%) of premises in the UK that are not commercially viable for the market to build and make a profit. The group worked on the barriers that local authorities experience within their sphere of influence in rolling out ubiquitous fixed broadband.



the UK5G and 5G alleged health effects. The group received presentations from the Head of UK5G and the founder of Innovate Comms outlined plans around unlocking the full economic and social benefits that 5G promises. Through a roundtable discussion, the group began exploring a coherent approach to the issue of pervasive anti-5G sentiment.



Establishing greater dialogue with MobileUK to influence rollout of mobile broadband where there is currently market failure. The group received regular update from Gareth Elliott, Head of Policy and Communications, MobileUK (the trade body for mobile network operators) to shared insights into planning reform in readiness for 5G and extending coverage in rural areas



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The separately established Task and Finish group 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.