


Report To: Cabinet

Date of Meeting: 18 December 2018

Lead Member / Officer: Cllr Hugh Evans / Graham Boase

Report Author: Stuart Whitfield DCC

Title: North Wales Digital Connectivity Strategy and Local Full Fibre Network Programme



1. What is the report about?

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. The Board is supported by an Executive Group comprising senior Officers from across the region. Individuals within the Executive Group are responsible for leading on individual Projects to help deliver the Vision. Steve Bayley of Wrexham CBC (Head of Housing and Economy) is the Senior Responsible Officer (SRO) for the regional Digital work, with support from Denbighshire's Economic and Business Development Team.

This report explains the opportunities and implications of the regional digital work for Denbighshire County Council.

2. What is the reason for making this report?

To provide an update on the digital work carried out to date by NWEAB, in particular the Digital Connectivity Strategy for the region along with one of the important projects to help deliver the Strategy, namely the Local Full Fibre Network (LFFN) project. The LFFN is a programme being operated by the UK Government's Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS).

Decisions are required in terms of the Council formally adopting the regional Digital Connectivity Strategy and the Council's role in delivering the regional LFFN project.

3. What are the Recommendations?

That Cabinet

- adopts the North Wales Connectivity Strategy
- approves Denbighshire County Council 's role as Lead Body on behalf of the North Wales Economic Ambition Board for the LFFN Project agrees that the Council enters into a suitable Inter Authority Agreement with the other partner bodies in respect of the LFFN Project
- authorises the Corporate Director Economy and Public Realm in consultation with the s151 Officer, Monitoring Officer and Leader to agree the final terms of the Inter Authority Agreement.

4. Report details

At their March meeting the NWEAB approved a Digital Connectivity Strategy for the region, which is attached as Appendix 1. Cabinet are asked to formally adopt the Strategy.

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 Fund¹. The Fund is only for investment in digital connectivity delivered by the public sector. It was proposed and agreed that DCC would be the lead authority for the purposes of the LFFN bid with Steve Bayley of Wrexham CBC continuing to provide the overall SRO role.

North Wales' LFFN bid has now been approved in principle by UK Government. The LFFN proposal currently stands at approximately £9 million investment in the region. The investment will be directed to improving connectivity across the public sector in the region, resulting in wider enhancement of networks serving communities.

5. How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Priorities?

The NWEAB's Digital Strategy and the LFFN project directly contributes to DCC's Corporate Priorities:

Connected Communities

- Make superfast broadband and mobile networks available to everyone.
- County-wide superfast broadband and mobile networks, including 4G and 5G.

A place where younger people will want to live and work and have the skills to do so

- Develop greater employment opportunities for younger people
- Employment that appeals to young people and matches their skills.

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 digital connectivity of this type as a consistent priority.

Around a third of the public sector sites to be upgraded are associated with health 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 (e.g. fax).

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/local-full-fibre-networks-programme>

6. What will it cost and how will it affect other services?

Additional Resources needed (staffing or financial)

ICT

Revenue and capital costs have been provided. DCC's Chief Digital Officer has provided a list of corporate sites for inclusion in the upgrade plan. On completion of installs there would be a potential revenue saving of 80k following on from a capital investment of 70k. Significant bandwidth improvements would be made with a knock on effect of improving Denbighshire's physical digital infrastructure. There will however still be areas of the County which are not reached by this intervention and the County Council will work with partners and communities to facilitate local interventions.

Legal

DCC legal costs will need to be met in drafting the appropriate legal documents in respect of an Inter Authority Agreement .

Biodiversity

No affects

7. What are the main conclusions of the Well-being Impact Assessment?

The project is focused on improving immediate and long term connectivity requirements across the public sector in north Wales and on improving connectivity for SMEs . In this respect the Well-being Assessment illustrates direct positive impacts across six of the seven goals and no negative impacts in any.

8. What consultations have been carried out with Scrutiny and others?

Consultation has been undertaken throughout the course of 2018 led by DCC's Economic and Business Development team, involving officers within DCC (Economic and Business Development, ICT, Customers, Communications and Marketing), and;

- each of the other North Wales Local Authorities (ICT and Economic Development)
- 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

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.

9. Chief Finance Officer Statement

Costs to the council associated with hosting the project should be recovered from the source funding or from contributions from the region. The formal inter authority agreement should ensure that risks around employment or wider project delivery are shared equally amongst partners.

10. What risks are there and is there anything we can do to reduce them?

There are no risks foreseen in the Council adopting the North Wales Connectivity Strategy. The Strategy should be reviewed periodically to ensure that it remains relevant.

11. Power to make the Decision

Local Government Act 2000 s.2 the power to enter into arrangements, that facilitate and are conducive to environmental, economic and social well-being.

The Local Government Wales Measure 2009 s.12 (2) in respect of collaboration duties.

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