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| <b>Report to</b>             | <b>Performance Scrutiny Committee</b>  |
| <b>Date of meeting</b>       | <b>8<sup>th</sup> June 2023</b>  |
| <b>Lead Member / Officer</b> | <b>Cllr. Emrys Wynne, Lead Member for Broadband and Digital Strategy</b><br><br><b>Liz Grieve, Head of Housing and Communities Service</b> |
| <b>Report author</b>         | <b>Philip Burrows, Digital Officer</b>   |
| <b>Title</b>                 | <b>Poor Internet Connectivity in Denbighshire</b>  |

## **1. What is the report about?**

1.1. The connectivity status of properties in Denbighshire.

## **2. What is the reason for making this report?**

2.1. To advise the members about the internet and telephony status in Denbighshire.

## **3. What are the Recommendations?**

That the Committee:

3.1. reviews and understands the information provided regarding the current situation of internet and telephony connectivity in Denbighshire; and

3.2. determines whether further scrutiny of specific connectivity issues is required.

## **4. Report details**

4.1. Out of the total 50,290 premises in Denbighshire 3,362 premises receive internet speeds of 30Mbps or less and 1,485 premises receive internet speeds of 10Mbps or less. (See Appendix A for more detail.)

4.2. 'Helping residents to understand options and solutions for improved internet connectivity' is an aim within our Corporate Plan and DCC have invested in a Digital Officer post (from February 2020 to May 2025) to advise individuals, businesses, and communities on this.

4.3. The Digital Officer works closely with Members and City, Town and Community Councils when advising communities.

4.4. This is important because the connectivity landscape and options for improvement are complex to navigate, owing to the following factors:

- i) There is no legal obligation on Openreach to connect every property with fibre.
- ii) Denbighshire County Council, the Welsh Government and UK Government, have no power to influence how a private company (Openreach) runs its business. We can only encourage them to install more fibre into our county by supporting residents to access UK Government 'Gigabit Voucher' grants.
- iii) The 'Gigabit Voucher' grants can only be accessed if numerous eligibility criteria are met, and often requires residents to work as a collective to pool their vouchers together for the value to cover the cost of install through the formation of a 'Fibre Community Partnership'. However, this is a time-consuming process and sometimes still is not enough to meet the cost.
- iv) Access to the 'Gigabit Voucher' scheme is impacted upon by other projects aiming to roll out fibre. For example, the UK Government 'Gigabit Project'.
- v) Alternative technologies such as wireless connections, satellite and 4G are available but are not always the best solution for residents.

(See Appendix B for more detail.)

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

5.1. This work relates to the 'A Better Connected Denbighshire' priority, specifically the aim about 'Helping residents to understand options and solutions for improved internet connectivity, including through Fibre Community Partnerships.'

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

6.1. There are no costs associated with the production of this report.

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

7.1. Not required for this report.

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

8.1. A workshop was held for the Performance Scrutiny Members on 27<sup>th</sup> April 2023 on this subject.

## **9. Chief Finance Officer Statement**

9.1. Not required.

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

10.1. Unless a community's collective Gigabit Voucher value equates to 130% of the Openreach quote, the collective requires a legal entity such as a Community Interest Company (CIC). This can be daunting and undesirable to residents and so the Digital Officer partners with Denbighshire Voluntary Services Council (DVSC) to provide community members with appropriate support through this process.

10.2. It was hoped that windfarm grant provision in Denbighshire could help bridge any funding gaps between the Gigabit Voucher scheme and fibre install costs. However, there is some trepidation from the fund managers around the likely future extent of demand, affordability for the grant funds and the value for money in such investment. Therefore, the Digital Officer will focus on Fibre Community Partnership Schemes that are most likely to be affordable with Gigabit Vouchers alone.

10.3. The Openreach Public Switched Telephone Network (PSTN) also known as the copper-based exchanges, will be turned off by December 2025. Premises using the fibre-based VoIP system should know they will lose emergency landline phone use in the event of a power cut. If their modem and phone do not have electricity, they cannot make a phone call. On the old copper-line based system, the small amount of electricity carried over copper-lines powered the phone. This is more problematic in areas with no 4g signal. The Digital Officer will work

to inform communities of this risk and seek to find other solutions where possible.

## **11. Power to make the decision**

11.1. Section 21 of the Local Government Act 2000

11.2. Section 7.2.3 stipulates that Scrutiny can consider any matter which affects the Council's area or its inhabitants