

Prosperous Overview and Scrutiny Committee - Wednesday 07 June 2023

Digital Infrastructure in Staffordshire Update

Recommendations

I recommend that the Committee:

- a. Endorse the update and approach being taken in deploying the Digital Infrastructure Strategic Framework
- b. Note the further areas of consideration and improvement being developed in support of the Council's overall digital first strategy.

Local Member Interest:

N/A

Report of Councillor Simon Tagg Cabinet Member for Environment, Infrastructure and Climate Change

Summary

1. This report provides a six month update on April and November 2022 Digital Infrastructure in Staffordshire report presented to this committee and provides further details on plans for the utilising the infrastructure and enabled technology, it is primarily for the information of members.

Report

Background

2. The Digital Infrastructure Strategic Framework (DISF) presented as part of the Digital Infrastructure in Staffordshire report to this committee in April of 2022 was agreed at Cabinet in June 2022, it set out key objectives to deliver improved connectivity and realise the benefits for Staffordshire businesses and residents.

National Context

3. Further to the background set out in the DISF, the national importance of digital infrastructure was highlighted when the new prime minister stated '**What really matters for economic success is innovation. If we want our country to succeed, we need to do what we've**

always done and embrace new technologies and the people and culture that creates them.'

Staffordshire Context

Digital Infrastructure update.

4. Project Gigabit. Building Digital UK (BDUK) is an Executive Agency of DCMS with a mission to ensure that homes and businesses across the UK can access fast and reliable digital connectivity. One of its main programmes is Project Gigabit, in May 2022 a market engagement exercise was conducted for Staffordshire (LOT19) to identify intervention areas requiring subsidy to have gigabit (1,000 Mbps) broadband delivery. Since that time and working with BDUK the following initiatives are proceeding:

- a. We believe there to be 435,000 premises for subsidy consideration in Staffordshire of which 51,000 are deemed ready for intervention with another 105,000 under review.
- b. BDUK are launching a (type A) procurement under the LOT19 project to subsidise gigabit delivery to 5,400 premises in the Staffordshire Moorlands and (North) East Staffordshire (from Moorlands down to just above Uttoxeter) areas.
- c. BDUK will also soon be launching another procurement (Type C) for eligible premises (currently 10,800) in the rest of the county (not covered by the Type A procurement).
- d. We are also working with BDUK and suppliers on enhanced voucher subsidy projects to deliver 4,800 premises into the County.
- e. As part of two on-going sub-regional procurements (Gigahubs, subsidised public sector buildings identified in intervention areas – one led by Nottinghamshire CC and another by the Department for Education) 122 premises (schools and some health centres) have been identified for subsidised gigabit connectivity.

5. An existing Central Government Gigabit Voucher scheme to provide financial support to premise owners in obtaining gigabit capable broadband service is currently ongoing. The voucher scheme is proving to be a popular and successful scheme and was enhanced by BDUK in December. To date existing voucher project ongoing have had the following impact:

- a. 21 communities (1,179 premises) have gone live with voucher support
- b. 6 communities (947 premises) in delivery and due for completion

c. 5 communities (320 premises) have been approved and are now awaiting delivery of gigabit services.

6. An example of how the Council team work with the community to develop and deliver a successful voucher scheme is Lea Heath and Drointon, near Hixon and Stowe by Chartley in Stafford Borough. In order to develop a scheme a community lead is identified and works with the Council team and supplier (in this case Openreach) to design a solution.

a. The map below show premises included in the scheme in purple x48, where each premise agreed to 'give' their voucher to support the scheme.

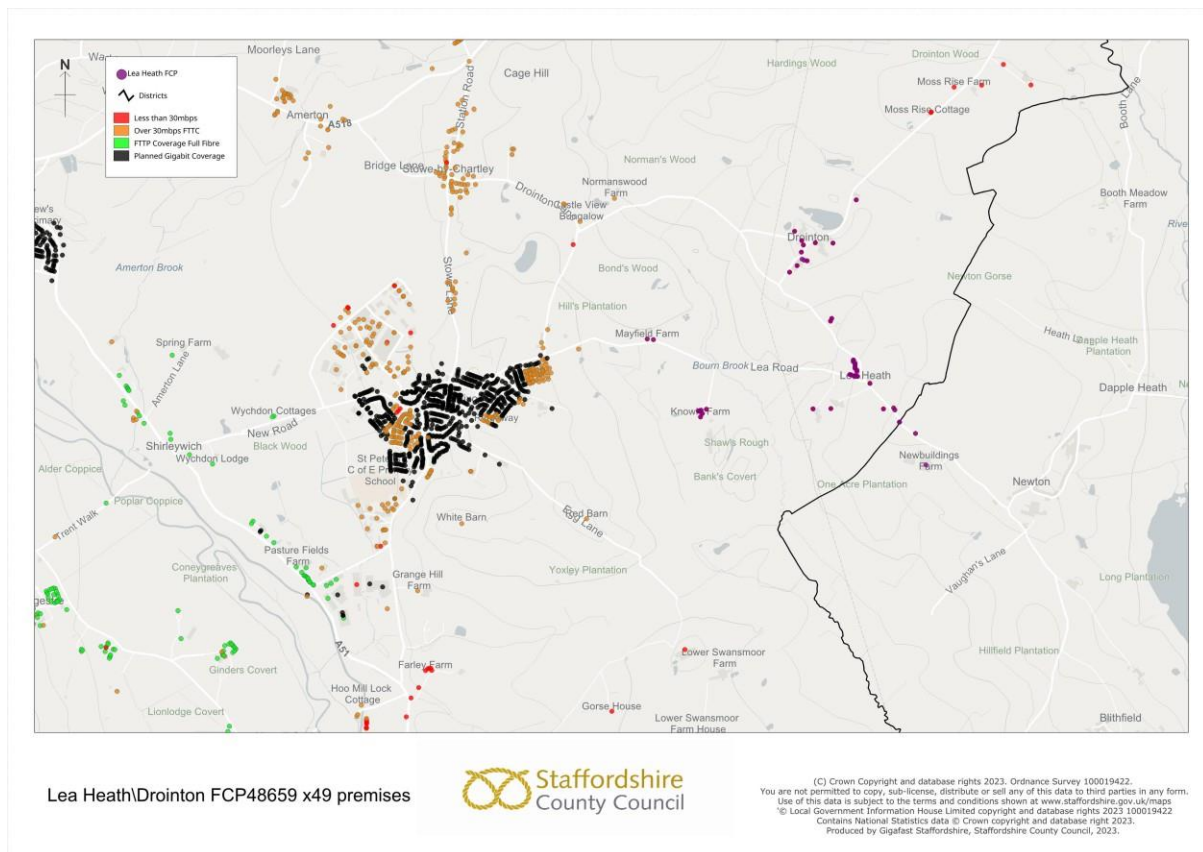
b. The application process began in October 2020 and went into delivery in March 2022 and premises went live with a full fibre service in December 2022.

c. The cost of the scheme was £99,431, (£2,071 per premise) with the Council 'topping up' the overall Government scheme with a grant of £8,976. Vouchers are still being claimed from individuals by Openreach to recoup their investment.

d. The initial community Lead, who lives in Lea Heath had to get help from another member of the community in Drointon as these are two small settlements and he didn't know every resident.

e. The Council team (Gigafast Staffordshire) helped advise both community leads and sent letters endorsing the scheme. Leaflets were distributed and social media by the team meant enough interest (i.e 48 premises) was established to make the scheme cost in.

f. Quote from Community Lead, "The speed and reliability of the new full fibre has allowed us to run our business (Dor-2-Dor Stoke) properly and efficiently from home"



7. Barrier busting approach. The team continue to encourage infrastructure investment by alternative network suppliers into the County. However, further work has been done to mitigate the disruption to vehicle traffic, pedestrians and residences as well as ensuring proper re-instatement of our highways assets. Working with the Highways team and suppliers on improving communication to residences and businesses impacted by the inevitable construction required as well as ensuring that the suppliers are aware of their responsibilities before they start construction and permits are issued we have created a 'Staffordshire Approach' document to be shared with the suppliers that sets out our expectations of their behaviours and what in return they can expect from the Council. This document is appended to this report.

Analogue lines withdrawal

8. In November 2017, the telecoms industry announced its intention to retire analogue telephone networks such as the Public Switched Telephone Network (PSTN) by the end of 2025. The industry will upgrade landline services to new digital technology using an internet connection, such as Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP), Digital Voice or All-IP telephony by December 2025/

9. The situation and implications to the Council has been investigated with the following notes/actions/recommendations presented to informal cabinet (26 April 2023)
- a. A departmental audit identified approximately 600 diverse analogue lines being used by the Council at the moment (175 security/alarm/lift lines, 350 single telephone lines, 70 traffic signals and a small number of CCTV lines. Departments are also asked to note increased cyber-attack profile when replacing analogue systems with digital alternatives. It was recommended that each department be responsible for replacing these lines within existing budgets.
 - b. Reputational risks need to be mitigated.
 - i. The initiative is industry led but will have impacts upon a number of our stakeholder communities (parish/district councils, voluntary groups, vulnerable groups who use telecare solutions etc). A communications programme will be done to inform these groups of the upcoming changes. Openreach have offered to support the communications initiatives.
 - ii. The analogue services have traditionally been powered from the local exchange, so in the event of local power failures premises using these analogue services have been able to remain connected. However, this change to digital services means that devices will now be powered locally/in premise and thereby will lose communications in the event of a power failure (Bad weather/storms etc) and battery back up/resilience needs to be considered. The civil contingency team have the initiative on their risk register and the potential impact will be further investigated.
 - c. As society becomes increasingly digital and the Council progresses its digital first strategy, we are becoming more dependent upon public telecommunications infrastructure to deliver service. Digital resilience needs to be considered i.e what happens to council services if/when industry decides to withdraw a critical infrastructure service. As well as the analogue line withdrawal we are aware that the mobile network operators and OFCOM are planning to withdraw 2G and 3G mobile services, this will impact services such as first generation smart meters, home alarm systems, care alarms, payment terminals etc.

Access and Adoption update

10. The Gigafast Staffordshire website has been live for nearly a year. The site continues to raise awareness on various digital connectivity solutions and technology, including broadband, mobile, fixed wireless along with a range of useful resources and links. The website has been created to provide Staffordshire residents and businesses with unbiased

advice and information, that will increase take up of services and help grow the digital economy.

- a. The latest research shows that UK has 42% of full fibre coverage but only a quarter is currently taking a service. Our team are working on increasing this by providing much needed content to tackle the know barriers such as cost, knowledge, confidence, awareness of availability, digital skills and cost.
- b. A recent article published by Smartinsights suggests, roles requiring digital skills pay 29% over those roles that do not. The Gigafast Staffordshire website signposts users to areas such as Ofcom, where to find social tariffs, how to obtain further digital skills (liaising with our training unit, libraries service etc).
- c. A recent report provided suggested that 'More than 8 in 10 middle-skill jobs (82%) require digital skills, a 4% increase since 2015: Spreadsheets and word processing remain the baseline for digital skills, with 78% of middle-skill jobs calling for these at a minimum. Therefore, it is vital that we encourage the residents of Staffordshire to increase their digital skills to help people find work and grow the economy. Both of the statistics provide can also be found on the Gov.uk website Current and future demand for digital skills - a call to action - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk).
- d. The team have designed a range of digital skills quizzes to suit a wide target audience that will be deployed across public facing sites across the county, this will include; GP surgeries, job centres, libraries, nurseries, visitor centres, leisure centres. The aim is to get people to complete the quiz to help identify if they have basic digital skills, upon completion they will be redirected to a wide range of free digital skills courses and provided with the relevant details to contact our internal Adult Community Learning teams' Digital tutors and IT buddies.
- e. The Digital Infrastructure team continues to manage the Gigafast Staffordshire social media channels and has carried out several campaigns. This includes a campaign on social tariffs which are still not largely known about. Another ongoing social media initiative is '#FullFibreFriday' which aims to share good news stories and updates on the development of the fibre network around Staffordshire each Friday.
- f. A survey published by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) shows 5.3m Britons have either never gone online or not used the internet in the last three months. This amounted to 10 per cent of the UK population in 2018, when the survey was conducted. The survey has not been repeated since the pandemic however what our community

engagement suggests, is that people have not gained the skills or confidence to stay safe online.

Digital Connectivity update.

11. The Digital Infrastructure team continues to work with other digital teams on how digital infrastructure enables the delivery of digital services to residents and business. This work includes looking at how the Council may be able to take advantage of future internal network procurements such as the Public Services Network which may provide further opportunities to co-ordinate cross government delivery, better access to social tariffs (only 2% of eligible people have taken up social tariffs in the UK) including enhanced tariffs for multiple dwelling units.
12. In collaboration with our neighbouring local authorities, Staffordshire County Council are working on a Regional Mobile connectivity project. We helped organise and co-hosted a Market Testing event to understand services that the market can enable to capture, monitor and analyse mobile phone coverage and services (2G, 3G, 4G and 5G) across the specified geography, broken down to a more detailed level for each of the councils. Following on from the market engagement event, we have drafted a DPS, as we now want to understand suggested methodologies to create an ongoing and dynamic view (data and voice) across participating counties. That will allow us to engage with mobile network operators, Ofcom, DCMS etc. to establish plans to improve the experience of our residents and businesses.
13. SCC are now represented in the DCMS - Digital Connectivity Infrastructure Accelerator (DCIA) Early Adopters Group (EAG). The EAG comprises a network of Local Authorities that have mobile digital strategies in place and want to understand lessons learnt and best practice from the early adopters in utilising mapping systems, perceived coverage issues and how best to use assets such as street lighting to provide better connectivity. The team has also engaged with our procurement team, legal team, street lighting team, EON (PFI supplier of lighting columns) and a mobile network operators on the practical deployment of improved 4G and 5G mobile services. We are also a member on the ADEPT Digital connectivity group, helping influence future public funded interventions.
14. The development of the digital infrastructure both fixed and mobile are key enablers to the economic future success of the county and we are investigating and progressing a number of connected initiatives as part of the work.

- a. The Public Service Network managed by the ICT team and host a number of other government clients as well as SCC departments is up for contract renewal this year and alternatives are being investigated that may enable further social value initiatives that support digital inclusivity into the county (e.g additional social tariffs, further support to deliver broadband services to the very hard to reach premises).
- b. We are working jointly on investigation the potential of the Internet of Things (IOT) devices may have in transforming the way some services (Childrens services, community health, housing services etc) can be delivered using IOT devices such as environmental sensors, real time digital signage, traffic insights, footfall monitoring. This work is also involving partner District/Brough Councils with both Lichfield and Newcastle Under Lyme (town deal) showing interest.

Timescale

15. The DISF set out the framework for delivery up until 2030 when we aim to achieve 100% gigabit connectivity. Recent procurement activity suggests that the target is achievable although some very hard to reach premises, estimated at between 0.3% and 1% may require either increased subsidy outside of Project Gigabit or alternative solutions such as low earth orbit satellite.

Link to Strategic Plan

16. A key priority of the Strategic Plan 2022-26 is to improve digital connections and to use digital technology to connect, inform and support the people of Staffordshire. Digital infrastructure is a key enabler of the ubiquitous use of digital services.

Link to Other Overview and Scrutiny Activity

17. N/A

Community Impact

18. The Digital Infrastructure project has a positive impact upon communities as it aims to reduce digital exclusion based upon a person's location and using the website signposts information leading to obtaining digital skills and support.

List of Background Documents/Appendices:

Appendix 1 – Fibre Streetworks Toolkit: The Staffordshire Approach (March 2023)

Digital Infrastructure in Staffordshire report delivered to this committee - [Agenda for Prosperous Overview and Scrutiny Committee on Thursday 4th April 2022, 10:00am - Staffordshire County Council](#)

Digital Infrastructure in Staffordshire report delivered to Cabinet in June [Agenda for Cabinet on Wednesday 15th June 2022, 10:00am Staffordshire County Council](#)

Staffordshire new website signposting digital infrastructure advice to residents/businesses www.gigafaststaffordshire.co.uk

Building Digital UK summer report updating progress on Project Gigabit including results of Staffordshire market test (LOT19)
www.gov.uk/government/publications/project-gigabit-delivery-plan-summer-update-2022

Openreach detail with regard to analogues lines withdrawal can be found at [PowerPoint Presentation \(openreach.com\)](#)

The Staffordshire Approach document setting out what is expected from network infrastructure deployment operators and what they should expect from the Council is appended (Appendix 1) to this document.

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