Digital Connectivity Working Group Update

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The ADEPT Digital Connectivity Working Group has met virtually in February with 18 colleagues' attendance from Local Authorities across the UK, but also from Local Government Association (LGA).

Local Authority representatives from Herefordshire, Cambridgeshire, Kent, Blackburn, Lincolnshire, Nottinghamshire, Shropshire, Somerset, Warwickshire and Wolverhampton were present in the meeting.

The Group received presentations from:

   a) BDUK – to give a brief about the Project Gigahubs. GigaHubs is one of the programmes BDUK is using to deliver the government ambition to deliver reliable broadband for everyone in the UK. Gigahubs aims to identifying sites with the greatest need, in the hardest to reach areas, that will benefit from improved connectivity and connect sites currently underserved by industry and presently commercially unviable. As part of the wider Project Gigabit, GigaHubs will use up to £110 million to connect public buildings such as rural schools, doctors' surgeries, and libraries to gigabit broadband. The government wants to connect up to 7,000 rural public sector buildings in order to improve public services. GigaHubs is targeted towards creation of Regional Programmes to build & drive collaborations across local public sector and other potential partner organisations Midlands Engine have agreed to take on a Regional Role across the Midlands geography; to convene and lead a collaboration group through the defined GigaHubs stages. An initial potential site list has been presented by BDUK and intent is to push for commencement of Procurement (going to market) in early to mid Q2 2022 – potentially end April 2022. Nottinghamshire County Council have agreed to lead the GigaHubs Procurement exercise on behalf of the Programme.

   b) BT – Small cell deployment for 5G coverage. Small cells remain a necessity to delivering future capacity requirements for the MNOs. Installations consists of small radio equipment & antennas that can be placed on structures such as street light columns and buildings. Each deployment requires three key elements: Power, Backhaul & Permitted Space for Installation.

   c) Mobile UK – mainly updated on:

   -   Local Authority Funding and Digital Champions (including recent research)
   -   The Shared Rural Network
   -   Planning reform and the Electronic Communications Code
   -   The Wireless Infrastructure Review

Gareth briefed the group on recent research that highlights the need for better assistance from local authorities to help understand and bolster collaboration with the telecommunications industry. The full report and research can be found here - https://www.mobileuk.org/news/connecting-the-uk-why-we-need-to-start-locally On the back of this research, there is a funding opportunity for Government to fund Digital Champions and to consider further assistance to bridge the understanding and perception gap that has grown around digital and mobile technologies.

AOB - Tom Denman from LGA mentioned that DCMS is looking for case studies of new local authority connected places / smart city projects to build into the future policy engagement, and activity to promote the uptake of the NCSC's Connected Places Cyber Security Principles. If anyone aware of any specific projects / case studies, please get in touch with Olivia Gass (olivia.gass@dcms.gov.uk).

LGA Annual Conference 2022 – Innovation Zone: Are you involved in a recent innovative project or solution that councils might benefit to learn from? Councils and organisations that work with councils can apply to take part in the Innovation Zone by visiting our applications page: https://www.local.gov.uk/lga-annual-conference-2022-innovation-zone

LGA Digital Connectivity Programme 2021: Superfast Essex "What is Full Fibre" campaign evaluation & Broadband Champion Toolkit https://www.local.gov.uk/case-studies/lga-digital-connectivity-programme-2021-what-full-fibre-campaign-evaluation / https://www.local.gov.uk/case-studies/broadband-champion-toolkit

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