



## Overview and Scrutiny Committee 17 March 2020 Briefing Paper

### Subject: Digital Connectivity in Cherwell

Director: Simon Furlong (Corporate Director of Communities)

Officer Responsible: Steven Newman (Senior Economic Growth Officer)

#### Background and Reason for Briefing Note

Members have requested further information on digital infrastructure and this Briefing Note provides background to the subject in advance of a presentation to be made to the meeting by the Digital Programme Director (Oxfordshire County Council).

#### 1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 At the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 30 January 2020, members raised concerns with mobile telephone reception in the district and were eager to encourage the provision of 5G ('fifth generation') infrastructure to support the future needs of residents and businesses.
- 1.2 The Council has in recent years been actively involved in partnership to accelerate the provision of digital infrastructure in recognition of its importance in creating a great district in which to live, work, visit and invest.

#### 2.0 Digital Infrastructure: Challenges and Opportunities

- 2.1 Following investment in the broadband infrastructure through a programme led by Oxfordshire County Council, over 97% of premises in Cherwell are now able to gain 'Superfast Broadband' (speeds greater than 24 megabits per second).
- 2.2 Masts and other infrastructure to support mobile telephony inherently require connectivity through fibre-optic cabling. That cabling also supports the roll-out of the next generation of full-fibre broadband to business and residential premises. However, the network providers and operators do not naturally collaborate.
- 2.3 The **challenge** therefore is threefold:
  - Almost 3% of premises in the district are currently unable to gain Superfast Broadband (recognised as today's basic benchmark).
  - There is a continuing need to gain investment in the infrastructure to support the future connectivity requirements of people and businesses.
  - The infrastructure will largely be provided by private investment and it is therefore important to create a strategy and processes that enable investment locally.
- 2.4 The **opportunity** to meet these challenges was considered by Cherwell District Council's [Executive on 3 February 2020](#) where it was resolved:
  - (1) That the success of the Better Broadband for Oxfordshire programme in exceeding the Government's delivery target for 'Superfast' broadband availability in Cherwell and the continuing progress to extend full fibre and mobile coverage through existing resources be noted.
  - (2) That the incorporation of the Oxfordshire Digital Infrastructure Strategy and Delivery Plan alongside



the Memorandum of Understanding, recognising its important contribution to the delivery of the Housing and Growth Deal, the Cherwell Industrial Strategy and the Council's other plans and policies, be supported.

(3) That it be agreed to actively participate in the Oxfordshire Digital Infrastructure Partnership, through its proposed Board, by appointing a Councillor (supported by a senior officer) to represent the interests of the Council, with the councillor appointment delegated to the Director Law and Governance, in consultation with the Leader.

2.5 The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) is attached as Appendix One and the Oxfordshire Digital Infrastructure Strategy (both in draft form) is attached as Appendix Two.

2.6 In advance of your meeting, several members submitted a series of questions. Answers to those questions are provided in Appendix Three. It will be possible to discuss these and any further questions during the meeting.

### 3.0 Conclusion

3.1 CDC is invited to join the Oxfordshire Digital Infrastructure Delivery Partnership to facilitate actions to achieve the goals to be created through the emerging Oxfordshire Digital Infrastructure Strategy and Delivery Plan. The Partnership will meet and liaise regularly, involving a designated representative from each partner body. This is set-out in a non-legally binding Memorandum of Understanding.

3.2 The adoption of the Oxfordshire Digital Infrastructure Strategy and Delivery will ensure that the Council is prepared – alongside its partners - for the Government to announce significant further funding opportunities. The Council will also facilitate investment by telecommunications operators through its policies, strategies and services.

### 4.0 Next Steps

4.1 The preparation of a clear and concise Digital Action Plan as part of the emerging Cherwell Industrial Strategy, to ensure that all functions of the Council contribute towards the aim of facilitating investment in digital infrastructure throughout the district.

4.2 A small cross-functional officer team contributes to and helps to deliver the Workplan, with a named officer representing each relevant service including economic growth, estates, housing, planning, communities and any service required to deliver the ambition of the Council.

**Completed by: Steven Newman**

**Date: 6 March 2020**

**Presented to: Overview & Scrutiny Committee**

**Date: 17 March 2020**