

Digital Connectivity Working Group

Purpose of report

For discussion and direction.

Summary

This paper sets out for approval the Digital Connectivity Working Group's proposed Terms of Reference, membership and initial focus. It also provides an update on how the Working Group will be resourced.

Recommendations:

That Members of the People and Places Board are asked to:

1. **Consider and approve:**

1.1 the terms of reference of the working group (**Appendix A**).

1.2 the areas to be recommended to the Group for initial focus (**paragraphs 3 - 4**).

2. **Note:**

2.1 the membership of the Working Group (**paragraph 7**).

2.2 the update on the future resourcing and delivery of the Working Group's work programme (**paragraphs 9 - 11**).

Action:

Officers to take forward work in line with members' steer.

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Digital Connectivity Working Group

Background

1. The People and Places Board has helped establish local government as a credible and respected voice in the field of digital connectivity. While members are keen to build on this position and advance their priorities in this area, the wide-ranging scope of the People and Places Board's 2017/18 work programme and the relatively limited capacity of LGA officers means that they are unlikely to be able to do so within the constraints of the current Board structure.
2. As such, at the last Board meeting members agreed in principle to the establishment of a working group to allow members to continue to contribute to the LGA's work on digital connectivity outside of the board's formal work programme.
3. This paper sets out for approval the Digital Connectivity Working Group's proposed Terms of Reference, membership and initial focus. It also provides an update on how the Working Group will be resourced and agree its remit. A final membership list will be tabled for members' review at the Board.

Remit of the Group

4. The Working Group's Terms of Reference give it full discretion to determine its remit within the framework of the Board's current lobbying lines on digital connectivity. With this in mind, it is proposed that the working group discusses the areas it might wish to focus on at an inaugural meeting in the coming weeks.
5. Given their leadership and experience on these issues members of the Board might wish to recommend that the group address specific subjects as initial priorities. These might include:

5.1. Ensuring fast and reliable digital connectivity is provided to new builds

5.1.1. Member councils have increasingly shared their concerns with the LGA regarding the failure of developers to pre-empt the need to provide connectivity to their new housing estates. This is despite a Government facilitated agreement in 2016 [between the Home Builders Federation and Openreach](#) to "to deliver "fibre based" superfast or ultrafast broadband connectivity into new build properties across the United Kingdom."

5.1.2. The scale of the issue was recently outlined in an article by [Cable.co.uk](#) which found that:

5.1.3. *"Only one of the country's top 20 developers said fibre broadband was available at all of the properties built by them in the past year. Asked what*

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percentage of homes built in the past 12 months had access to superfast broadband at the point of completion, most didn't respond, declined to comment or claimed they didn't know."

5.1.4. The working group might wish to consider undertaking a survey of member councils to fully understand the issue at hand and inform lobbying activity going forward.

5.2. Ensuring accurate mobile coverage data reflective of consumer experience.

5.2.1 Officers have previously outlined member councils' concerns regarding the representative nature of Ofcom's mobile coverage data. In some instances, councils believe it is not reflective of the realities on the ground in rural areas. This is concerning because it is this data that will be used to hold mobile providers to account on their coverage obligations. Accurate data would also ensure councils are better placed to have more strategic conversations with mobile providers to fully understand their roll out plans and, where appropriate, help the extension of provision through the use of public infrastructure.

5.2.2 The group might wish to re-engage Ofcom on the work it is undertaking to improve the mobile coverage data available to councils and consumers.

Membership of the Working Group

6. Based on the membership structure of the People and Places Board, the Group is made up of the following members to ensure political proportionality.

6.1. Three Conservative Members.

6.2. One Labour Member.

6.3. One Liberal Democrat Member.

6.4. One Independent Member.

7. The current membership of the Digital Connectivity Working Group is as follows:

Cllr. Deborah Croney	Conservative	Dorset County Council
Cllr. Rob Waltham	Conservative	North Lincolnshire Council
Cllr. Tom FitzPatrick	Conservative	North Norfolk District Council
Cllr. Leigh Redman	Labour	Somerset County Council
Cllr. Sarah Osborne	Lib Dem	Lewes District Council
To be confirmed	Independent	To be confirmed

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Resourcing of the group

8. Given the extensive work programmes of both the People and Places and City Regions Boards it is currently not possible to support the activities of the digital working group using existing LGA staff resources. As such, it was proposed that the working group secures its own resources to support its activities.
9. At the time of writing the Association of Directors of Environment, Economy, Planning and Transport (ADEPT) have agreed in principle to establish an officer's working group to sit under the Board's group, and deliver its work programme. LGA officers will provide members with an update at the Board meeting.
10. It is suggested that where possible LGA officers attend meetings of the working group in an observer capacity to provide an officer link between the group and Board.

Next steps

11. Members are asked to:

11.1 Consider and approve:

- 11.1.1. The terms of reference of the working group (**Appendix A**); and
- 11.1.2. the areas to be recommended to the Group for initial focus (**paragraphs 3 - 4**).

11.2. Note:

- 11.2.1. The membership of the Working Group, with the full membership to be tabled on the day of the Board (**paragraphs 5 - 6**); and
- 11.2.2. the update on the future resourcing and delivery of the Working Group's work programme (**paragraphs 9 - 11**).