

Rural Digital Connectivity

Purpose of report

For information.

Summary

This paper and separate confidential briefing provide members with an update on the Government's downgrading of its gigabit-broadband-for-all target in preparation for the visit of Justin Leese, UK Gigabit Programme Delivery Director, Building Digital UK (the broadband delivery arm of Government) to the Board.

Recommendations

Members are invited to:

- **Note** the latest gigabit-broadband development outlined in **paragraphs 2-4**.
- **Note** that a confidential briefing to support discussions with Mr Leese will be sent separately.

Action

- Officers will proceed as directed by members.

Contact officer: Daniel Shamplin-Hall
Position: Adviser
Phone no: 0207 664 3314
Email: daniel.shamplin-hall@local.gov.uk

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Background

1. This paper and separate confidential briefing provide members with an update on the Government's downgrading of its gigabit-broadband-for-all target in preparation for the visit of Justin Leese, UK Gigabit Programme Delivery Director, Building Digital UK (the broadband delivery arm of Government) to the Board.

The Government's Broadband Announcement at the Spending Review

Broadband

2. Following the success of the local government-led Superfast Broadband Programme, last year the Government committed £5 billion to rolling out gigabit broadband to all premises by 2025, bringing forward the previous government target by eight years. However, at the recent Spending Review, it announced a downgrade of this target:
 - 2.1. It is now working with industry to target a minimum of 85 per cent gigabit-capable coverage by 2025 of which UK Gigabit Programme will deliver 5 percentage points (alongside delivery in the most commercial 80 per cent of the country).
 - 2.2. It will spend over that time period £1.2 billion of the £5 billion that the Government has committed over the course of the programme. The Government has reconfirmed that the entirety of the £5 billion funding will still be available to the programme.
 - 2.3. In the period to 2025, BDUK will be focussing this funding on those premises that do not have access to superfast broadband, wherever possible.
3. From LGA officers interaction with councils on the ground, it was been clear for a while that the Government's original commitment was extremely ambitious. However, with the commitment made, and now downgraded, our member councils, rural councillors and their communities are disappointed and are seeking further clarity about future delivery of the programme
4. Justin Leese, UK Gigabit Programme Delivery Director at Building Digital UK will attend the January Board to address members on this latest development. This is an opportune moment for members to question Government on its current delivery timescales and secure a commitment for it to set out a revised timeline to achieving universal gigabit-broadband coverage for all.

Implications for Wales

5. Digital infrastructure policy is a devolved responsibility.

Financial Implications

6. The Board's activities are supported by budgets for policy development and improvement.