Report of the Executive Director for Place, Lincolnshire County Council

Meeting*: 1ˢᵗ July 2022*

GREATER LINCOLNSHIRE

JOINT STRATEGIC OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE

Collaboration to improve residents' and businesses' access to broadband: Project Gigahub

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1. OBJECT AND KEY POINTS IN THIS REPORT

This report explains that Lincolnshire County Council, North East Lincolnshire Council, and North Lincolnshire Council propose to collaborate on a scheme called "Project Gigahub" which installs broadband equipment on publicly owned assets. The installation of equipment on publicly owned assets will reduce the cost to the private sector of delivering high quality broadband to hard-to-reach locations, thus rendering it more viable which in turn will increase broadband services to our communities and residents.

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2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Gigahub project is a BDUK funded project that seeks to connect publicly owned rural buildings to a gigabit capable full fibre connection. BDUK is the government's agency which is responsible for the strategy to deliver broadband. The sites chosen are rural by definition and are deemed 'eligible' for public funding, given the absence of an existing or planned gigabit fibre connection.

Sites chosen are approved by BDUK based upon evidence gathered from commercial providers active in the area.

BDUK are seeking collaborative approaches from Local Bodies to engage in the Tender process initially and manage the project through to completion. The project will be fully funded by a BDUK government grant.

emPSN, N. Lincolnshire, NE. Lincolnshire & Lincolnshire Collaboration:

Over the past few months, the three councils have been in discussion with BDUK, with a view to a joint approach to initiating a project for the N. Lincs, NE Lincs and Lincolnshire geographical areas. Discussions have been ongoing and working with emPSN (East Midlands Public Service Network), who had already done a significant amount of work identifying eligible educational premises, the Team has

arrived at 204 premises identified and approved by BDUK as eligible, although we are still looking at a number of other potential sites.

These sites are a mix of primary schools, blue light locations, doctor's surgeries, and a few other miscellaneous public buildings.

The Team is now going through what BDUK term the 'Value for Money' (VFM) assessment with a view to ensuring that money spent will deliver tangible benefits to the chosen site. When this is complete, the project will go through a series of BDUK checkpoints to ensure they are fully compliant to go to Tender.

3.   DETAIL OF OPTIONS/PROPOSAL

A Tender will be released to interested commercial operators and the Tender process itself will be managed by Lincolnshire County Council on behalf of the three authorities under the BDUK Dynamic Purchasing System (DPS).

We expect the project to go to Tender in the autumn of this year with a view to appointing a successful provider in March or April 2023.

The term 'Gigahub' refers to the project's wider potential deployment over and above the individual site chosen. The site chosen would receive the fibre connection from the nearest telephone exchange (referred to as the 'fibre spine') and it is hoped that because the cost of the provision of the fibre spine into an area has been met by public funding, then commercial operators would be encouraged to branch off the spine and deploy to adjacent communities along its route. To date, there is a good degree of interest from these operators.

As stated above, this scheme will improve the fibre spine in 204 facilities across the three councils' area.

4.   RESOURCE AND LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

The scheme is part of BDUK's approved framework and as such is compliant with Subsidy Control legislation.

Following discussions with all interested parties, it has been agreed the LCC will lead on the project. LCC has confirmed it has the capacity to run the project on behalf of all concerned and will pick up the operational time and cost of the project.

Each party has now approved a Memorandum of Understanding and a representative from each has been appointed to the project operational team. Above the operational team will sit a Senior Responsible Officer from LCC and a senior member from each party to sit on the steering committee.

Given the early stage we are still in, a stakeholder comms plan has yet to be defined and agreed, but a proposed meeting structure is currently in place and further governance agreed and published as we move through the next few months.

5.   **RISKS AND OPPORTUNITIES (INCLUDE EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT IF RELEVANT)**

There are two main risks: compliance and resource.

Compliance: as stated above, Project Gigahub is a national programme which has been assessed by DCMS and has been found to be compliant with all relevant legislation notably subsidy control legislation

Resources: LCC's broadband team has the resource to deliver this scheme on behalf of the three upper tier authorities.

6.   **CONSULTATION/ENGAGEMENT**

All resident and business surveys demonstrate that communities would want better and faster broadband services, therefore this project will directly meet a need that businesses and residents have identified.

7.   **GOVERNANCE – DECISION(S) FOR MEMBER COUNCILS REQUIRED**
        (in accordance with the Joint Committee's Terms of Reference).

This project will be subject to a capital appraisal at Lincolnshire County Council because the grant funding, which represents 100% of the costs of the scheme, flows through that council.

As there is no financial commitment to North East Lincolnshire or North Lincolnshire Council it is not envisaged that a formal decision is needed from those authorities.

8.   **RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that JSOC:

- invites officers to progress to the next stages of Project Gigahub as described in sections 2 and 3 of this report

- approves the detailed project governance of the scheme as set our in section 4 of this report

CHIEF EXEUTIVE/DIRECTOR OF LINCOLNSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

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Date: *21st June 2022*

Background Papers used in the preparation of this report –

The following link describes the project aspirations and parameters.

GigaHubs: key information - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

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