Nottinghamshire County Council

REPORT OF THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

DIGITAL CONNECTIVITY IN NOTTINGHAMSHIRE

Purpose of the Report

1. The purpose of this report is to

   a) Accept £4,975,948 of Government funding towards the £10m 5G Connected Forest project
   b) Approve establishing two fixed-term digital connectivity posts to support the contract management and promotion of the Better Broadband for Nottinghamshire project rollout, until June 2022
   c) Approve establishing a permanent Digital Connectivity Manager post to realise the Council's approach to digital connectivity
   d) Approve extending the existing Broadband Project Manager and Broadband Engagement Officer posts until 31 July 2020, to cover the period that the digital connectivity posts are established
   e) request that the Policy Committee capital programme is varied by £5.37m to reflect the capital expenditure that will be incurred on the 5G Connected Forest Project

Information

2. Nottinghamshire County Council has played a key role in getting the digital ball rolling with strategies, policy initiatives, investment and funding. Our Council Plan "Your Nottinghamshire, Your Future" has, as one of its 12 commitments, improving fixed and mobile digital connectivity. The Council has always looked to move the county up the digital evolution curve. Through a mix of private and public sector involvement, for the past eight years we have led the way in ensuring the availability of full and partial fibre-based digital infrastructure.

3. In November 2018, we were the first county in the East Midlands to be selected for Openreach's local full fibre build. Successive waves of private sector innovation and investment recently saw West Bridgford selected next for engineers to begin installing the cables and infrastructure required to connect the area.

4. Today, 11.16% of Nottinghamshire has full-fibre, over 98.1% of our county can access superfast speeds greater than 30 megabits per second (30 Mbps) and where our new digital infrastructure has been installed, over 61% of premises (homes and businesses) have made the switch to high-speed Internet access.

5. Unlocking the vast amount of potential to drive tourism growth is also a key priority. In February 2019, this Committee approved the Council's first ever Visitor Economy Strategy.

The Strategy is about adding value and stimulating market growth through the Council's role as a leader, influencer, facilitator and investor. The Strategy proposed that the county's tourism offer is focussed on the Council's asset to develop three key tourism hubs around: Sherwood Forest, Rufford Abbey Country Park and Holme Pierrepont.

6. The Council recognises that technology and digital connectivity are rapidly changing the way people travel and how audiences interact with the world around them. This change is an opportunity for the Council and its partners to understand visitor's motivations and habits in new and innovative ways.

The '5G Connected Forest' Project

7. On 20 February 2020, Government announced the Council as one of the nine projects across the country to receive a share of £35 million from their rural and industrial 5G (fifth generation) competition. The '5G Connected Forest' Project will build on our unrivalled digital achievements and shows our county's ability to deliver the latest technologies to support the lives of our residents, businesses and visitors, to stimulate our creative and digital industries. Sherwood Forest will see cutting-edge apps transform the visitor experience, with Robin Hood telling the history of the medieval Forest via virtual and augmented relation on 5G networks. New robotic environmental management will also be tested, alongside live monitoring of the health of Sherwood Forest to preserve the site for future generations.

8. This £10 million project is a unique opportunity for Nottinghamshire to become a world-leader, exploiting the technological innovation that 5G can offer by developing and using innovative technology for destination branding for the visitor economy, preserving the wellbeing of the environment, and creating a scalable and sustainable commercial grade network.

9. As the Accountable Body, Nottinghamshire County Council will manage the project, assure consortium members claims and draw down the funding. Policy Committee approval is therefore being sought to accept £4,975,948 of Government funding towards half the costs of the 5G Connected Forest Project. The remaining equal match is made up of consortium partner contributions.

Staffing Resources

10. In November 2019, Policy Committee agreed to extend the existing Broadband Engagement Officer post by four months to enable an internal review of the staffing resources to take place. This assessment has taken place and identified a lack of appropriate capacity as a risk for both the Better Broadband for Nottinghamshire project rollout and the 5G Connected Forest project going forward, particularly given the high levels of external funding involved. The review assessed the existing Broadband Project Manager role does not sufficiently cover the seniority or skilled support for the complex consortium requirements.

11. We now need to extend the two existing posts for a further four months to 31 July 2020 to enable appropriate job descriptions to be developed as outlined in paragraph below.

12. To ensure that the appropriate level of staff resource is allocated to fulfil the existing Better Broadband for Nottinghamshire Programme and the 5G Connected Forest Project contractual obligations as well as the Council's approach to digital connectivity, it is proposed the following three posts are established:

a) **One permanent full-time equivalent Digital Connectivity Manager post** - Leading on digital projects and generating a pipeline of future digital connectivity and smart infrastructure schemes and bids, to expand digital (fixed and mobile) coverage across the County.

b) **One fixed term full-time equivalent Digital Project Officer post (to June 2022)** - Coordinating the performance and financial aspects relating to the management of several contracts with telecommunication suppliers and associated funding agreements.

c) **One fixed term full-time equivalent Digital Engagement Officer post (to June 2022)** – to develop and implement an engagement strategy to encourage take up of high-speed connectivity (both fixed and mobile) amongst all sections of the population.

13. The planned extension of the two fixed term posts, referred to in paragraph 11, provides the opportunity to develop appropriate relevant job descriptions for the newly established posts which will ensure the most effective recruitment outcomes. There is money available within the Growth and Economic Development budget to cover the costs.

14. For the next two financial years (2020/21 and 2021/22), there is money available within the Growth and Economic Development budget to cover the costs of these 2-year fixed-term Digital Project Officer and Digital Engagement Officer posts.

15. The Digital Connectivity Manager post will initially be funded from the 5G Connected Forest Project. Thereafter, the post will continue developing digital projects and generating a pipeline of digital connectivity and smart infrastructure schemes and bids, to expand digital coverage (fixed and mobile) across the County. From April 2022 onwards, it is anticipated that the costs associated with the Digital Connectivity Manager post will be met from the Growth and Economic Development Staffing Budget.

16. The three newly established posts will require full job evaluation to determine the correct grading. Initial discussions around the potential grades of each of the roles, indicate that there are enough funds within existing budgets to meet the costs. Recruitment to these roles will be in accordance with the Council's agreed recruitment policy and procedure.

Other Options Considered

17. The staffing structure was reviewed in line with PRINCE2 guidelines which found the proposal was the best way for the County Council to realise its digital connectivity ambitions. Whilst maintaining the status quo was considered, it was discounted due the evolution of the UK's digital infrastructure and the accelerated Government targets for the availability of full fibre and 5G networks, all of which require getting the right skills in place.

Reason for Recommendations

18. The changes proposed to the new staffing establishment outlined in the report will enable more effective delivery of both the Better Broadband for Nottinghamshire Programme, the 5G Connected Forest Project and other digital projects prioritised by the Digital Development Programme Board and the Department's Leadership Team.

Statutory and Policy Implications

19. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of crime and disorder, data protection and information governance finance, human resources, human rights, the NHS Constitution (public health services), the public sector equality duty, safeguarding of children and adults at risk, service users, smarter working, sustainability and the environment and where such implications are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

Financial Implications

20. Subject to Policy Committee agreement to support the 5G Connected Forest Project, Government funding will pass through the Council's accounts across 2020/2021, 2021/2022 and 2022/2023 to fund both the Council's committed resources and the partners' grant claims.

21. It is proposed that the Policy Committee capital programme is varied by £5.7m to reflect the capital expenditure that is expected to be incurred on the 5G Connected Forest Project, funding by £4.9m capital grant and £0.8m from reserves. An opportunity is being explored to lever in £0.5m of Local Growth Fund funded which, if successful, will replace an element of reserve funding required.

22. All staffing costs will be funded from within existing Growth and Economic Development budgets, except for the Digital Connectivity Manager post for the period to March 2022.

Human Resources Implications

23. The Council aspires to be at the forefront of digital connectivity and therefore aims to recruit the best candidates to take forward this priority. Once developed the job descriptions will be subject to full Hay evaluation and be subject to a rigorous recruitment process in accordance with agreed policy and procedure.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Policy Committee:

1) accepts £4,975,948 of Government funding towards the 5G Connected Forest Project
2) approves establishing two fixed-term digital connectivity posts until June 2022, to support the contract management and promotion of the Better Broadband for Nottinghamshire project rollout
3) approves establishing a permanent Digital Connectivity Manager post to oversee the management of the Better Broadband for Nottinghamshire project, the 5G Connected Forest Project, develop digital projects and generate a pipeline of digital connectivity and smart infrastructure schemes and bids to expand digital coverage (fixed and mobile) across the County
4) approves extending the existing Broadband Project Manager and Broadband Engagement Officer posts until 31 July 2020, to cover the period that the digital connectivity posts are established

5) requests that the Policy Committee capital programme is varied by £5.37m to reflect the capital expenditure that will be incurred on the 5G Connected Forest Project

COUNCILLOR MRS KAY CUTTS MBE
Leader of the Council

For any enquiries about this report please contact: Nicola McCoy-Brown, Growth and Economic Development ext. 72580

Constitutional Comments (AK 26/02/2020)
24. The report falls within the remit of Policy Committee under the terms of reference.

HR Comments (GME 09/03/2020)
25. It would be usual to have full job descriptions worked up prior to going to Committee for approval. However, to maximise the funding available and as there is existing cover from the extension of the 2 fixed term posts to 31 July 2020, this is the most timely and appropriate way forward. The Council's agreed policy and procedures will be applied to the job evaluation and recruitment processes.

Financial Comments (SES 28/02/2020)
26. The financial implications are set out in paragraphs 12 to 22 of the report.

27. If Policy Committee agrees to support the 5G Connected Forest Project, government funding will pass through the Council's accounts across 2020/2021, 2021/2022 and 2022/23 to fund both the Council's committed resources and the partners' grant claims.

28. It is proposed that the Policy Committee capital programme is varied by £5.7m to reflect the capital expenditure that is expected to be incurred on this project, funded by £4.9m capital grant and £0.8m from reserves. An opportunity is being explored to lever in £0.5m of Local Growth Fund funding which, if successful, will replace an element of reserve funding required.

29. The additional staffing costs for 2020/21, 2021/22 and 2022/23 will be borne by the existing Growth and Economic Development budget.

Background Papers and Published Documents

Except for previously published documents, which will be available elsewhere, the documents listed here will be available for inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

- *Better Broadband for Nottinghamshire – Resources to 31 March 2020,* Report to Policy Committee, published 13 November 2019

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

- All