

## **Cabinet Scrutiny Committee**

**(Via Microsoft Teams)**

**Members Present:**

**21 October 2020**

**Chairperson:** **Councillor M.Harvey**

**Vice Chairperson:** **Councillor S.Rahaman**

**Councillors:** S.E.Freeguard, N.T.Hunt, S.K.Hunt, A.Llewelyn, S.Miller, R.Mizen, J.D.Morgan, S.Paddison, L.M.Purcell, S.M.Penry, S.H.Reynolds and A.N.Woolcock

**Officers In Attendance** A.Evans, A.Jarrett, H.Jenkins, S.Phillips, C.Davies, C.Griffiths, S.Curran, C.Plowman, A.Thomas, N.Pearce, L.Beynon, R.Bowen, S.Brennan, R.Crowhurst, J.Merrifield, C.Morris, P.Curnow and J.Woodman-Ralph

**Cabinet Invitees:** Councillors C.Clement-Williams, D.Jones, L.Jones, R.G.Jones, A.R.Lockyer, P.A.Rees and P.D.Richards

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### **1. Declarations of Interests**

The following members made a declaration of interest at the commencement of the meeting:

Councillor M.Harvey                      Re the Swansea Bay City Deal Infrastructure Project as he is a member of the Swansea Bay City Region Joint Scrutiny Committee.

Councillor S.Freeguard                      Re the Swansea Bay City Deal Infrastructure Project as she is a member of the Swansea Bay City Region Joint Scrutiny Committee

Councillor A.Llewelyn

Re the Swansea Bay City Deal  
Infrastructure Project as he is a member  
of the Swansea Bay City Region Joint  
Scrutiny Committee

## 2. **Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

That the minutes of the following meetings be approved:

- 2 September 2020
- 17 September 2020

## 3. **Pre-decision Scrutiny**

The Committee was provided with a short presentation which gave a strategic overview of the digital infrastructure project of the Swansea Bay City Deal; this particular programme of work and proposed investment was in relation to the connectivity of the region, including Neath Port Talbot. It was clarified that the investment would include full fibre fixed connectivity, the associated infrastructure to support it and mobile connectivity, primarily 4G, 5G and Internet of Things advanced wireless networks.

Officers explained that it was a £55 million programme spread over 5 years; £25 million of the total was City Deal funding and the other £30 million was to be brought in from the private and public sectors. It was highlighted that the public sector contributions were not local contributions, instead they were estimated to come from national competitions and funding streams. In relation to the private sector contributions, it was noted that it would be leveraged in as part of the various procurement exercises conducted; the private sector were conservative in terms of the financial targets and Officers stated that they did not foresee any issues in meeting those targets.

The presentation detailed the delivery of the proposed project across three work streams which included rural, next generation wireless and connected places; the project would deliver connectivity in various forms and locations across those three work streams:

- Rural – investment in rural connectivity, ultimately a number of interventions to support the most rural communities and badly served communities e.g. demand stimulation, promotion of existing funding streams for people to exploit and supporting residents, communities and businesses

- Next generation wireless – seed funding to attract future 5G and 4G+ coverage for certain areas where prudent and some advanced wireless networks to facilitate all sorts of used cases the region would seek to fund e.g. driverless cars and SMART manufacturing. The diversity of the region offers numerous opportunities to prove and deliver the use of 5G for the future
- Connected places – investment in full fibre broadband and full fibre networks across the urban parts of the region particularly Port Talbot, Neath, Swansea and Llanelli

Members noted the main reasons as to why the project was taking place which was split into problems to solve and opportunities to exploit, and how working together with Welsh and UK Governments, telecoms industries and regional partners and stakeholders would help to make a difference.

Some of the problems to solve included:

- Extremely limited full fibre coverage (only 2.6% of Neath Port Talbots premises, business and homes had full fibre broadband); intend to use the projects finances to leverage as much connectivity as possible
- 22,000 homes across the region who struggled to access even a 30MB per second quality of internet provision; intend to reduce this number significantly
- Distinct lack of supplier competition, which is one of the reasons why the region wasn't well served in terms of connectivity; intend to change this by working with industry and utilise the finances to attract competition to make sure reliable, sustainable and fast connectivity could be built

Some of the opportunities to exploit included:

- Innovation and new business streams; the digital marketplace and provision of digital services offer huge potential
- Social inclusion and cohesion; this links with sustaining communities as it helps to bring work to people and allow people to connect to work
- Future proofing the regions infrastructure; the investment was for the future as well as present day

It was mentioned that the current Covid 19 pandemic had highlighted the importance of connectivity, as many people had to work from home and/or run their businesses online.

Officers displayed a diagram which captured how the programme will be structured and delivered; they highlighted that the digital infrastructure project board steered the digital infrastructure PMO. It was noted that the members of the board were people who were focused on the strategic direction of the region's economy and its social equalities and social wellbeing.

A discussion took place in relation to a presentation that was previously provided to Members; a proposal for a superfast cable in South Wales which was brought forward by Sir Terry Matthews and his associates at the time. Officers stated that this was what the City Deal was being built around previously, but it had since then changed direction.

Members asked if Officers could clarify where Neath Port Talbot connected places were. It was stated that Port Talbot and Neath as well as Swansea and Llanelli would be targeted in terms of duct and fibre network; the intention was to run a procurement to connect public sector assets and to provide a footprint for a significant inward investment in to connect as many premises and communities across Neath Port Talbot as possible. It was added that at the current stage there wasn't a specific list of businesses and/or communities that would be targeted; Officers would be able to begin to understand exactly which communities were within scope and would likely be included, once the marketing testing and procurement started.

Following a question in relation to how to get 5G, it was noted that in order to obtain good 5G coverage, in the same amount of area that you could get 4G, very good distribution of fibre was required.

In regards to the rural work stream, it was asked whether the whole region would be covered or if certain areas of the region would be targeted; and if the latter, were there certain parts of Neath Port Talbot, for example certain valleys or hubs, that were going to be focused on. Officers confirmed that they had detailed intelligence and data in terms of who is connected and what they could expect to receive at the moment; the current priority was to target the worst served in regards to connectivity, in the rural areas. It was mentioned that the current budget wouldn't be enough to connect everyone, however there was investment ongoing from UK and Welsh

Government, as well as from City Deal as previously mentioned; the importance of working with partners to ensure efforts weren't doubled was raised. It was stated that data and maps which highlighted the worst served areas could be shared with Members.

Members raised the importance of the City Deal project having synergy with other relevant strategies, both public and private sector, particularly in relation to connectivity in the valley areas; this would add value and ensure the work being carried out within the strategies tied together effectively. It was mentioned that a lot of Officers who were involved in other strategies, e.g. the valley task force, were involved in the City Deal project; the work from all areas such as health, education and particularly economic growth was heavily based around having connectivity moving forward. Members were informed that there was already a few funding streams available to communities; Officers intended to help the region become better at supporting communities and exploiting the funding opportunities that already existed for connectivity and to help communities peruse funding and deliver community projects.

It was highlighted that good, dependable information about the roll out of 5G needed to be communicated outwards in order to prevent further concerns about 5G; it was confirmed that there was a fourth work stream in which Officers who represent the region would help local authorities to deal with these sorts of issues as they were well versed in responding to 5G queries and health concerns.

The Committee discussed aspects of the rural work stream, and noted that due to the diversity of the region, there were mixed approaches in dealing with the particular work streams. It was stated that Offices recognised the importance of rural areas, the underserved communities, the businesses who operate and the people who were now working from home in those communities, which is the reason behind the blended approach to the work streams and the distribution of investment across the work streams was dictated by that. It was added that in light of the Covid 19 pandemic, amendments were recently made to the business case to strengthen the argument for social equality and what is fair and right for communities especially in rural areas.

Following Scrutiny, the Committee was supportive of the proposals to be considered by cabinet.

## **CHAIRPERSON**