

Report to: Blackpool, Fylde and Wyre Economic Prosperity Board

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Date of Meeting: 16 September 2020

LOCAL FULL FIBRE NETWORK

1.0 Purpose of the report:

- 1.1 To receive an update on the Full Fibre Network and the advantages for Councils who are not already members of joining the cooperative.

2.0 Recommendation(s):

- 2.1 That the Board recommend to both Fylde and Wyre Borough Councils to the join the cooperative and enter into further dialogue with Tony Doyle Head of ICT Services at Blackpool Council who leads on the Full Fibre initiative in Blackpool and Shaun Fensom the Chair of the cooperative.

3.0 Background Information

The previous meeting of the board on the 3 June 2020 expressed an interest in how the Local Full Fibre network(FibreBlackpool.com) recently established along the Tramway in Blackpool could be expanded and developed further to benefit the wider Fylde Coast. A map of the current network is attached at Appendix 5a.

Blackpool has been successful in bidding to the Department Of Culture Media and Sport (DCMS) for a Full Fibre Wave 2 Grant under the Asset Reuse method by using an existing ducting asset in the Tramway to build a fibre optic spine along the Tramway. DCMS awarded Blackpool £3.1million to populate the duct with Fibre and build out the ducting infrastructure further to connect Council assets and to service both Enterprise Zones, the new Conference Centre at the Winter Gardens as well as establish a series of Meet me chambers across the Promenade. In effect this has created a spinal fibre network that can be used by the public sector to connect its own assets and the spare capacity can be made available through a broadband co-operative to the private sector. Due to some challenges with the cost of the fibre dig to the Hillhouse Enterprise Zone, Wyre Council has also recently committed additional funding to the Fibre project from Enterprise Zone retained business rates growth to ensure the Fibre spine reaches all the way to the Hillhouse Enterprise Zone.

The cooperative vehicle is key in ensuring State Aid compliance and was originally established in Tameside who received Wave1 Local Full Fibre from DCMS . The cooperative's formal name is Cooperative Network Infrastructure(CNI) <https://cni.coop/> and is open to both large and small Internet Service Providers as well public sector organisations who wish to collaborate in enabling the building out of a Local Full Fibre infrastructure under dig once principles. For example if the Council is carrying out some public realm works which involve digging up a pavement it makes sense at the same time to install a fibre duct and make the spare capacity in this duct available to co-op members at a market rate thereby avoiding multiple telecoms companies digging the pavement and installing their own separate fibre ducts. In essence the Cooperative Network Infrastructure brings together public and private sector organisations to create and share new digital infrastructure.

It is now also possible with BT Openreach's Physical Infrastructure Access(PIA) for co-op Members to also purchase spare capacity in Openreach ducts and telegraph poles at wholesale rates and combine Cooperative Network Infrastructure ducting to connect individual businesses and properties to minimise digging new ducts.

In Autumn 2020 an undersea International Fibre Optic link will connect Blackpool to New York at the Airport Enterprise Zone. The connectivity is being carried by Aquacomms a Dublin based company that specialises in delivering secure, resilient Transatlantic connectivity . This is part of a larger network known as the North Atlantic Loop connecting America and Europe. The arrival of this International connectivity which will potentially carry a third of the world's Internet Traffic between America and Europe provides the Fylde Coast with an unrivalled and unique opportunity to attract inward investment and build a stronger digital economy in the area. Combining Local and International Fibre potentially creates new opportunities for the local and regional economy.

Expansion and Development

The work on the Fibre spine in Blackpool is now nearly complete and the first Full Fibre business customers from the Guest House sector have already been connected by a broadband coop member. These businesses are already reporting transformational benefits to their businesses from the Fibre connectivity having been poorly served by slower copper connections in the past. The broadband coop members are now gearing up their marketing and early indications are demand from businesses and residents is strong for the enhanced connectivity speeds full fibre can bring.

A number broadband coop members have expressed an interest in developing their footprint beyond the Blackpool boundaries, there is also potentially opportunities particularly targeting rural areas to bid for further funding from DCMS. A combination of collaborative working, seeking further funding opportunities, potential private investment from cooperative members some of which have significant investment backing from large financial institutions could enable further expansion and growth of the cooperative network along the Fylde Coast.

There is therefore an open invitation from Fibre Blackpool and Cooperative Network Infrastructure for both Fylde Council and Wyre Borough Councils to join the broadband coop. There is no financial commitment for the Councils to join other than £1, just a commitment from the Councils to explore collaborative approaches to sharing and developing Fibre optic infrastructure.

It should also be noted that it is also worthwhile exploring how the Council's own network infrastructure needs may be better served by collaborating or investing in a Fibre infrastructure. There are opportunities to not only connect Council buildings but increasingly other assets such as CCTV or Car Parks can benefit. Fibre connectivity is also a key enabler in the advancement of 5G and the Internet of Things(IOT) technologies that will become essential for towns and cities to compete in the digital economy.

Local Authority membership of Cooperative Network Infrastructure

Local authorities can join other public sector bodies as members of Cooperative Network Infrastructure with a number of possible benefits:

- Work collaboratively with other public sector bodies and with telecoms operators and investors
- Share digital infrastructure assets between public and private use to make savings and improve services
- Accelerate deployment of full fibre for the benefit of the local economy for example using 'dig once' opportunities

Local authorities currently in membership of Cooperative Network Infrastructure are Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council, Blackpool Council and Manchester City Council.

All cooperative members are expected to contribute to the governance of the cooperative and make a minimum investment of £1. Members can then trade with Cooperative Network Infrastructure for example by providing or accessing assets or making further investment for a return.