

Wiltshire Council

Environment Select Committee

4 June 2024

Update on Broadband Provision in Wiltshire

Executive summary

This report provides an update on the provision of broadband across Wiltshire and updates the committee on plans for future provision.

Proposal

That the committee:

- a) notes the content of the report.
- b) notes the future delivery plans across Wiltshire.

Reason for proposal

To provide an update on the provision of broadband across Wiltshire and update the committee on plans for future provision.

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Broadband Provision in Wiltshire

Purpose of report:

1. This report serves to update the Environment Select Committee on progress in supporting the delivery of broadband provision across Wiltshire, noting progress made to date and briefing the committee on future activities.

Background:

2. The Wiltshire Online programme has run since 2013 and sought to deliver broadband to premises that were considered commercially non-viable. The programme has operated on the best value principle – seeking to deliver broadband to the maximum number of premises rather than targeting specific locations.
3. To date there have been four contracts awarded by Wiltshire Council to upgrade provision or deliver Superfast broadband (30MBPS) resulting in over 97,000 premises upgraded. In addition, to support the economic recovery of Salisbury, Openreach invested to make Salisbury the first full-fibre city in the UK, upgrading approximately 20,000 premises.
4. Government programmes supporting provision of Superfast Broadband (30MBPS) ended in March 2022 and have been replaced by Project Gigabit. Project Gigabit seeks to deliver Gigabit level capability at 900MBPS, a substantial increase in capacity. The target is to deliver 85% Gigabit capability across the UK by 2025, getting close to 100% by 2030. Gigabit speeds require a "full fibre to the premises" (FFTP) connection, whereas previous contracts have often involved "full fibre to the cabinet" (FFTC or FFTH) delivery.
5. In Wiltshire, Project Gigabit exists presently as a collaboration with Building Digital UK (BDUK), Wessex Internet and Wiltshire Council securing in 2024 full fibre to the premises for 14,500 rural South Wiltshire residents and business premises combined.
6. North Wiltshire continues to be in the procurement cycle with Building Digital UK, and work is progressing on a cross regional connectivity solution (known as a Type C procurement) later in 2024.
7. Owing to this procurement activity, Project Gigabit vouchers remain paused in many parts of the UK, and throughout all of Wiltshire. Project Gigabit vouchers are available to groups of homes and businesses meeting the following criteria
 - existing available broadband download speeds are less than 100Mbps
 - a gigabit-capable network isn't likely to be built to that area commercially soon
 - there is no government-funded contract planned or in place to improve your network already

As Wiltshire currently has two Project Gigabit contracts, one in place (South Wiltshire) and one in the planning (North Wiltshire), it is possible that few Wiltshire

properties will be eligible for a voucher. Nonetheless, as vouchers are un-paused a notification will go out to residents who have already expressed an interest.

8. This report provides an update on the breadth of the programme activity, including closure of the legacy projects, progress for Wiltshire’s Superfast programme, updates to the broadband voucher scheme and research-based data to reflect the impact increased connectivity is having upon Wiltshire’s residents and businesses will be commented upon.

Main considerations for the committee:

9. The below table sets out current coverage levels for broadband across Wiltshire and comparator authorities (county authorities in the Southwest). Wiltshire performs well on both Superfast and FTTP level capability compared to similar authorities, but it is slightly below the national standard, that Project Gigabit will help to improve. This is expected in a rural area, where there are barriers to delivery.

Current Coverage Levels:

Authority	Q1 2024		
	Superfast (>=30 Mbps):	Gigabit (DOCSIS 3.1 or FTTP):	Full Fibre (FTTP or FTTH):
Wiltshire	97.09%	69.06%	54.19%
Shropshire	99.07%	64.47%	61.72%
Cornwall	95.95%	59.49%	57.72%
Devon & Somerset	95.44%	71.20%	62.58%
Dorset	97.43%	55.07%	53.21%
England	98.20%	83.44%	66.09%

Looking ahead:

Superfast Contracts & Evaluation

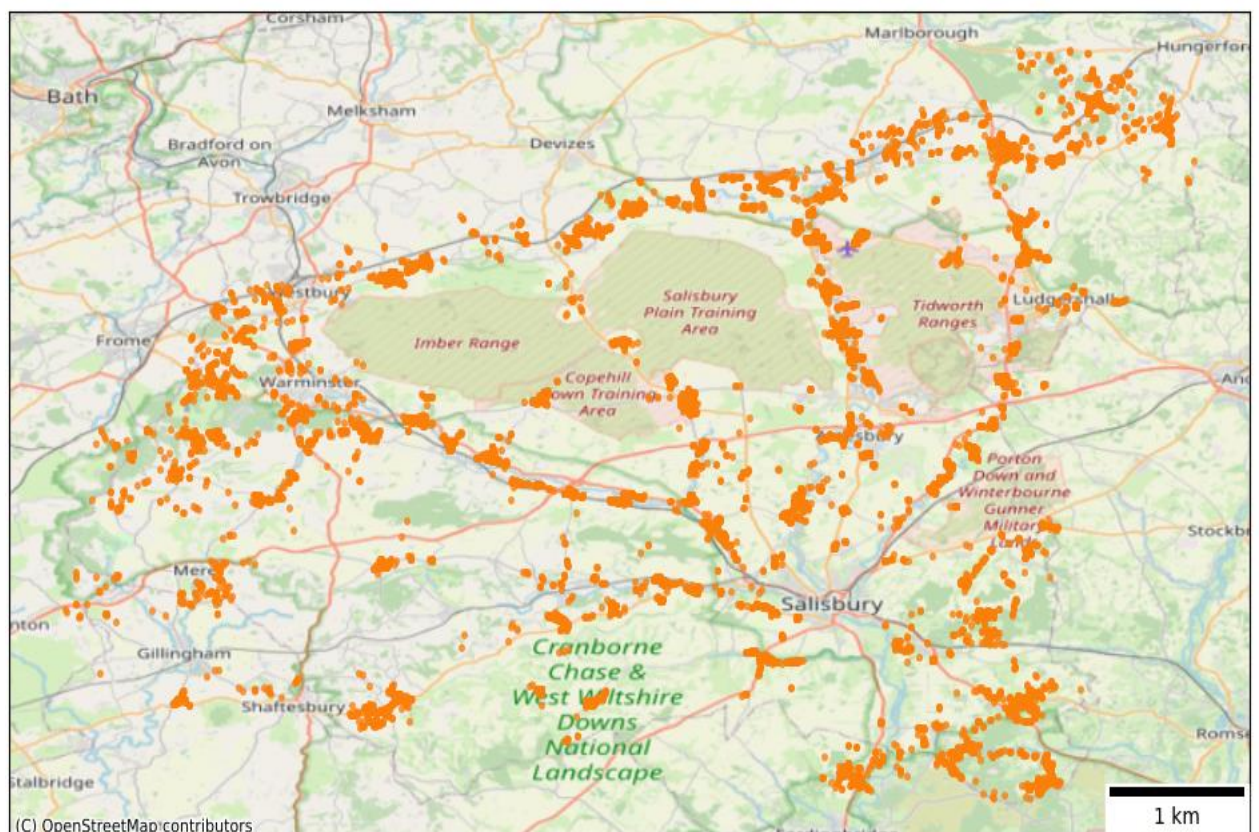
10. Openreach and Gigaclear legacy contracts from the Superfast programme are in the latter stages of closure. Monitoring will continue with Openreach until 2027, with all documentation and requests for evidence being managed between Wiltshire Council and BDUK
11. UWE Bristol has been commissioned to produce a full Wiltshire summative connectivity report by April 2025 to measure the impact of new infrastructure since 2017. The research will focus on the three central pillars of society, economy, and sustainability.

Project Gigabit

12. In March 2024, BDUK awarded supplier Wessex Internet a £18.8 million contract to provide around 14,500 hard-to-reach premises in South Wiltshire with access to gigabit-capable broadband.

13. BDUK and Wiltshire Council are working collaboratively with the supplier on ensuring that network build commences as quickly as possible once the supplier has completed their detailed plans for this build. An amount of preparatory work is required to reach premises prior to being able to access a service. This varies depending on geography and supplier. The first premises under this contract are anticipated to have access to gigabit-capable broadband by the end of 2024. Once the gigabit-capable network has been built, residents and businesses will be able to request a connection from a broadband service provider to benefit from the faster speeds.

14. Below is a map of the areas due to be upgraded in the awarded South Wiltshire contract.



15. Please note the premises to be reached by the contract is subject to change following detailed planning by the supplier or due to technical reasons during the lifetime of the contract.

16. Owing to this procurement activity, Project Gigabit vouchers remain paused in many parts of the UK, and throughout all of Wiltshire. Project Gigabit vouchers are available to groups of homes and businesses meeting the following criteria

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- there is no government-funded contract planned or in place to improve your network already

As Wiltshire currently has two Project Gigabit contracts, one in place (South Wiltshire) and one in the planning (North Wiltshire), it is likely that voucher eligibility will be limited.

17. Nonetheless, as vouchers are un-paused a notification will go out to residents who have already expressed an interest and the broadband manager will seek to assist in seeking to progress applications. The voucher value has been increased to £4.5k per eligible premises irrespective of residential or commercial profiling.
18. In South Wiltshire, Wessex Internet can be consulted at any time, and provides a useful portal to check eligibility and planned deployment through Project Gigabit and or raise enquires: <https://www.wessexinternet.com/project-gigabit-south-wiltshire/>
19. North Wiltshire remains in procurement under the Type C cross regional framework. Supplier bids were submitted in February 2024. Building Digital UK continues to evaluate these bids and remains hopeful for a connectivity solution later this year. Once more is known an announcement will go out.
20. The base level Project Gigabit portal is now live, and Project Gigabit is now widely publicised.

Mobile Connectivity and Connectivity Challenges

21. Connectivity matters relating to broadband infrastructure and especially areas identified as suffering poor connectivity should be reported: broadband@wiltshire.gov.uk Wiltshire Council staff will endeavor to work with Building Digital UK to find solutions and opportunities to innovate.
22. Please note issues relating to poor connectivity due to ISPs failing to deliver an adequate service should be referred to ISPs by the consumer in the first instance and or Ofcom, where consumer advice and resolutions should be sought.
23. Officers are also progressing conversations surrounding mobile connectivity. Mobile Network Operators Virgin and O2 are due to meet regularly with Wiltshire Council and begin reviewing information regarding Shared Rural Network connectivity “not spots”. Some areas have already been identified, the position in Wiltshire is largely reflected in the House of Commons connectivity report dated March 2024. Openreach are also involved in conversations, the innovation to improve not spot areas is within the communication sector. We hope to report more progress in the coming months.

Environmental impact:

24. Adoption of digital connectivities supports working from home, reducing traffic congestion, enabling groups to meet online vs travelling for meetings. More evidence will become known in April 2025 once the UWE Bristol connectivity summative assessment reports outlays their findings.
25. Short term disruption and environmental impact for residents and businesses while infrastructure is implemented. Efforts are made to mitigate impact through

collaboration and early signposting with Wiltshire Street Works and Highway Records officers, this continues and is managed routinely.

Equality and diversity impact of the proposal:

26. Wiltshire Council makes sure it does not discriminate in providing services and encouraging positive employment practices across communication providers and stakeholders.

27. Wiltshire Council was key to securing the ITT corporate social responsibility element of the Wessex Internet Type B contract, encompassing positive employment, recruitment, retention, and apprenticeship practices into the heart of their operations.

Risk assessment:

28. No risks to highlight if this position changes the risk/s will be notified. This position is routinely checked with Building Digital UK and other services within Wiltshire Council during regular highlight meetings.

Legal implications:

29. No legal implications to highlight if this position changes the implications will be notified. This position is routinely checked with Building Digital UK and other services within Wiltshire Council during regular highlight meetings.

Options considered:

30. This is a national programme and there are no further options to consider.

Conclusion:

31. Project Gigabit has increased in pace. South Wiltshire has procured the regional services of Wessex Internet through BDUK, increasing connectivity for an additional 14,500 residents and businesses combined. Wiltshire Council continues to support as an active partner, and deployment is scheduled to begin in September 2024.

32. North Wiltshire continues to be in the procurement cycle with Building Digital UK, and work is progressing on a Type C cross regional connectivity solution later in 2024.

33. Owing to this procurement activity, Project Gigabit vouchers remain paused in many parts of the UK, and throughout all of Wiltshire. Project Gigabit vouchers are available to groups of homes and businesses meeting the following criteria

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34. UWE Bristol has been commissioned to produce a full Wiltshire summative connectivity report by April 2025 to measure the impact of new infrastructure since 2017. The research will focus on the three central pillars of society, economy, and sustainability and will be used to inform future work.
35. Shared Rural Networks and collaboration with mobile network operators is needed to explore the opportunities to innovate and improve identified not spots for residents, businesses, tourists, and service personnel. We hope to open channels of collaboration wider in the coming months to find connectivity solutions beyond Project Gigabit.

Appendices (useful reading):

[Building Digital UK - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)

<https://labs.thinkbroadband.com/local/england>

[Access to Telecommunications Networks Bill 2023-24 - House of Commons Library \(parliament.uk\)](https://www.parliament.uk)

Specific enquiries and information requests should be sent to broadband@wiltshire.gov.uk