

Wiltshire Council

Cabinet

3 November 2020

From Ian James

**To Councillor Ian Blair-Pilling, Cabinet Member for IT, Digitalisation,
Operational Assets, Leisure and Libraries**

(The questions have been assigned to the relevant Cabinet Portfolio)

Item 5 – Public Participation

Sometime in the past [Cllr Whitehead was] the lead on the roll out of fibre broadband to houses in Wiltshire. Wiltshire is one of the largest, but also one of the poorest counties in the UK the effects of COVID 19 will be with us until a vaccine is found, which may never happen. The changes in working practices and continuous lockdowns will impact the economic prosperity of the people of Wiltshire.

I am sure you fully appreciate the importance of high speed broadband to all houses in Wiltshire to allow people to work from home, and children to maintain their schooling.

Question 1

How many houses in Wiltshire now have fibre to their homes? How many homes are still left without fibre to the home?

Response

Since the inception of the Wiltshire Online Programme in 2013, we have delivered multiple contracts using differing technical solutions, namely Fibre to the Cabinet (FTTC) and more recently, Fibre to the Premises (FTTP).

As at 29th October, “Think Broadband”, the UK’s largest independent broadband news and information site, reports that Wiltshire has 96.06% fibre coverage at >24Mbps, and 95.43% coverage at >30Mbps.

Currently over 94,000 premises in Wiltshire has access to a fibre enabled service, as a direct result of the Wiltshire Online programme of funded intervention, with an additional circa 7,000 premises to be fibre enabled, as part of our current Phase 3 contracts.

This figure excludes any commercial operators build activity, as we do not have line of sight to their commercial data, other than through the likes of “Think Broadband”, which is already available in the public domain.

Notwithstanding the above, without this significant investment by Wiltshire Council, these premises (approx. 40% of Wiltshire) would not have been upgraded to fibre, as they were considered to be commercially non-viable.

Question 2

Why is the programme in North Wiltshire running 2 years late, many homes were informed this broadband service would be delivered in 2019, and are now being informed it will be in 2021.?

Response

Initially the start of the Gigaclear build was delayed due to the lack of the right quality tier 1 and tier 2 sub-contractors required, to deliver within time and to the necessary standard. This has been an issue experienced across the UK, not just in Wiltshire and one that Central Government BDUK, through the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, has been aware of.

In addition, the originally planned deployment timeframes were impacted by necessary EU State Aid compliance activities. Now that these EU State Aid activities have been concluded and formally approved, Gigaclear have subsequently published the revised dates for all communities, on their website.

Notwithstanding the above, the Gigaclear deployment in the north of the county has also faced significant technical and engineering challenges, including having to plan and negotiate the crossing of six Network Rail structures, multiple wayleaves, multiple bridge and culvert crossings and multiple planned road closures from the North heading South, to allow for the backhaul (the main fibre supply to the world wide web) to be brought down the A429 route

Question 3

What date will the roll out of fibre to the homes be complete?

Response

Current Phase 3 Contracts - The Gigaclear Lot 1 North build programme is currently forecast to be completed by the end of Q4 FY 2021/22, whilst the Lot 2 South Openreach delivery is currently scheduled to finish by the end of Q1 FY 2021/22, subject to no unforeseen circumstances presenting during the remainder of the build

Question 4

What finance is available to continue this important infrastructure roll out?

Response

Wiltshire Council does not have any uncommitted funds, nor headroom in its current Phase 3 contracts, to further extend its planned deployment, beyond the above dates.

The Conservative government made a manifesto commitment to cover the whole of the UK with “*gigabit-capable*” broadband services by 2025 and to spend £5bn on helping to reach those in the hardest to reach (final 20%) of areas. Details on this intervention are still emerging and are very much at the planning stage with the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, through Building Digital UK.