

## NOTICE OF MOTION – CLLR K DAVIS – DIGITAL SPINE CONNECTION

### Executive Summary

At its meeting on 30 March 2023, the Council referred the following Notice of Motion to the Executive.

#### Councillor K Davis

“At the March Overview & Scrutiny Committee meeting, Enterprise M3, the Local Enterprise Partnership discussed the Guildford to Basingstoke Digital Spine and confirmed that Woking would not have a spur to join the Gigabit link.

Connecting to the Internet via Gigabit links is a key part of the Digital Strategy as it is important for the economic output of the borough as well as the limitless opportunities high speed links provides to residents.

Would the Council please investigate opportunities that exist with a view to ensuring that the borough is connected to the fastest possible digital backbone as soon as possible and certainly within three years if it cannot be achieved within the Digital Strategy period.”

#### Officer Comment

“The origins of the spine project lie in the need for two landmark Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) supported projects – the 5G Innovation Centre (5GIC) at University of Surrey and the Basing View Enterprise Zone – to have enhanced digital connectivity. This illustrated the lack of adequate ‘backhaul’ capacity in the area - backhaul being the intermediate links between the core network and the local access networks which serve end users.

Enhancing this capacity increases network coverage by providing wholesale access to the core network that can then be used by Internet Service Providers and mobile operators to support the delivery of services.

Given this need the LEP began to explore whether it would make sense to build some additional spine infrastructure to provide the necessary backhaul capacity and serve both the 5GIC and Basing View as well as accelerating the delivery of local access networks and better connectivity along that route where there were significant points of unmet demand.

Given the end points an efficient route design clearly could not cover the whole of the EM3 area, whether Woking or Winchester.

The LEP is, however, building into the contract documentation the scope for extensions and enhancements to the original spine to be undertaken. Woking could most certainly develop a proposition for a connection to the spine. Other authorities in the EM3 area both in Hampshire and Surrey are also considering such proposals. I would also bear in mind that the route which covers centres such as Guildford, Basingstoke, Camberley, Farnborough, Aldershot and Farnham, already has fibre connectivity in existence in these places or planned, similar to Woking (Openreach and other network operators). It is not clear who will provide the infrastructure first, and it may be that Openreach delay roll out because of the spine (but unlikely).

As far as Woking is concerned, linking businesses to the spine would have benefit for those businesses along the route, but infrastructure needed to expand it would be costly and will be undertaken by the private sector.

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Openreach have already started upgrading premises to full fibre (FTTP) on 46 of its exchanges in Surrey including Woking. At least 75% of the premises served on these exchanges are anticipated to be upgraded by December 2026.

Since the production of Woking Borough Council's Digital Strategy in 2022, gigabit coverage (speeds at 1000mbps) provided by all network operators has increased by 37% to 85.75%.

Officers will investigate further and report to a future Economic Development Working Group.”

**Background Papers:** None.

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