



ENVIRONMENT, CLIMATE EMERGENCY AND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE

Monday, 1 February 2021

REPORT TITLE:	LIVERPOOL CITY REGION DIGITAL CONNECTIVITY DIG ONCE POLICY
REPORT OF:	DIRECTOR OF RESOURCES

REPORT SUMMARY

Liverpool City Region Combined Authority (LCRCA) are building a 200+ km underground fibre network that will run through all six local authorities and will be delivered through a Combined Authority (CA) Joint Venture partnership with a private company. The purpose is to create a new telecommunications network infrastructure that will provide ultrafast broadband connectivity across the region and create conditions that improve choice for businesses and residents, stimulating competition and improving products and pricing.

The initial network will consist of four ducts which will run through all 6 Local Authority Areas and will connect LCR to external national and international networks. An initial route has been proposed for Wirral which takes in our major regeneration areas. In time it is planned that the network will be expanded to other parts of Wirral. The plan is to build the initial network in 3 years starting from mid-2021.

As part of the build Wirral Council has been asked to sign up to a "Dig Once" policy. Dig Once is the proposal that we install ducting at the same time that we undertake road, cycling and walking schemes. This approach can reduce the cost of deployment by as much as 50%, minimises disruption to road and public transport users and helps avoid any future embargos in specific locations across LCR.

The CA team have secured £6.39m from LCRCA's Strategic Investment Fund (SIF) for Dig Once. The CA team will assess each "Dig Once" opportunity and decide if the particular scheme meets their criteria. If it does, they will fund the authority to put ducting in the ground as part of the project delivery. Once the work is completed ownership of the ducts and fibre network will revert to LCRCA.

The Dig Once approach has been formally-recognised in the Government DCMS (Department for Culture, Media and Sport) 'Barrier Busting Toolkit' which aims to make it as cheap, quick, and easy as possible to deploy network infrastructure.

RECOMMENDATION/S

The Environment, Climate Emergency and Transport Committee are recommended to approve the Dig Once Collaboration Agreement and the Inter Authority Agreement and authorise the Director of Law and Governance to arrange the execution of the documents on behalf of the Council in accordance with the Council's Constitution".

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S

- 1.1 Adopting a Dig Once policy will reduce costs and minimise disruption during the build process.
- 1.2 Dig Once is an important component of the LCRCA Infrastructure plan as it underpins the cost base and delivery timescales.
- 1.3 Not taking advantage of a Dig once opportunity would mean not being able to excavate that route for between 2-3 years because of Highway regulations.
- 1.4 Wirral will benefit from having a world class fibre network to supplement other commercial networks such as Openreach and Virgin Media.
- 1.5 To keep costs down and accelerate deployment the new network is likely to utilise existing Openreach ducting which is available for use under Ofcom Open Access rules for some parts of the route. This along with Dig Once will minimise disruption during the build process.

2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 2.1 The only other option is that the Council does not sign up to the Dig Once Policy. This would significantly increase network build costs in Wirral and could have the effect of de-scoping areas of Wirral from this programme of work.

3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1 The Liverpool City Region (LCR) Fibre Network is a city regional telecoms network of high capacity fibre cabling. It is intended to improve LCR fibre connectivity for long-term productivity improvements. Once operational, the network will stimulate the private sector to deliver fibre broadband in areas that roll out would not otherwise extend to. This maximises the reach of improved digital connectivity and will support both digital inclusion and economic growth.
- 3.2 The project will cost circa £30m with 50% funding coming from LCRCA and the rest from the joint venture partner (JV) . It will create an estimated 500+ jobs (mainly in construction) and over the 15 year JV period has estimated benefit values of £110m. It is estimated that 100% Fibre-to-the-Premise (FTTP) coverage, which this project aims to accelerate, could be worth £1b to the Liverpool City Region.
- 3.3 Without intervention, incumbent providers will still deploy fibre to the premises broadband(FTTP), but their rollout plan will lead to sub-optimal social and economic outcomes because:

- The rate of rollout will be slower without the planned intervention.
- The pattern of rollout would exacerbate the LCR's digital divide given the tendency for commercial rollout to focus on areas of economic opportunity at the expense of more deprived and rural communities.
- Speeds and phasing could be sub-optimal as commercial operators will be unlikely to prioritise the Metro Mayor's transformational change agenda.

3.4 Following the impacts of COVID-19, digital ecosystems such as this could play a vital role in the recovery of the retail, hospitality, tourism, and leisure economies.

4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

4.1 There are no direct financial implications to Wirral Council to signing up to a Dig Once policy. All funding requirements for the programme will come from LCRCA.

5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Wirral Councils Legal Services team have reviewed the Inter Authority Agreement and Collaboration Agreement and have advised that the documents identify and address all the relevant legal implications.

6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: STAFFING, ICT AND ASSETS

6.1 Wirral Council Highways and Infrastructure Design and Commissioning team would include Dig Once requirements as part of future commercial tenders.

7.0 RELEVANT RISKS

7.1 Dig Once opportunities change the scope and duration of planned schemes.

7.2 Ducting is not delivered to required standard and hence not serviceable in any future contract.

7.3 General project delays associated with COVID-19 (e.g., project team illness, construction stoppages, supply chain issues).

7.4 LCRCA are to be found in breach of State Aid regulation at some future date.

8.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION

8.1 Engagement and consultation activities will be picked up through the various schemes, the fibre network ducting programme would piggy-back.

9.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

9.1 The policy and associated actions may bring a positive impact for all socio economic groups in the long term by helping to make services and utilities more affordable.

10.0 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

10.1 Signing up to the Dig Once Policy will have a positive impact on Wirral Environment and Climate Change priorities as outlined in the 'Sustainable Environment' theme in the Wirral Plan 2025. This is because the programme removes the need for separate excavations, digs and refills and the additional traffic movement and disruption generated as a result. This will reduce plant, machinery and materials required to complete the work as well as reducing associated pollution. The implementation of improved connectivity through the fibre network will also support the delivery of the 'Inclusive Economy' theme in the Wirral Plan 2025 and will reduce the requirement for journeys as more commerce will be conducted through digital means.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1

High level map of proposed route through LCR.



Appendix 2

See enclosed document 1- IAA Schedule 1 Wayleave Agreement.

Appendix 3

See enclosed document 2- Dig Once Collaboration Agreement schedule1- Project profile form.

Appendix 4

See enclosed document 3- Dig Once Collaboration Agreement schedule2 -Inspection sign off.

Appendix 5

See enclosed document 4- Dig Once Collaboration Agreement.

Appendix 6

See enclosed document 5- Inter Authority Agreement for Dig Once.

BACKGROUND PAPERS.

Link to video

<https://www.liverpoolcityregion-ca.gov.uk/what-we-do/digital/>

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date