

Update for GMW Board – Digital Connectivity

Digital Connectivity has been identified as one of the 8 areas in the Vision for Growing Mid Wales. It has time and again been highlighted in relation to the Mid Wales economy from a range of stakeholders across the public and private sectors.

However, digital connectivity is a vast arena – with a lot of work ongoing at national and local levels in the public and private sectors. From UK and Welsh Government initiatives directly delivering large infrastructure rollouts (Superfast Cymru, BDUK, Outside In), Voucher Schemes and Policy Support – alongside work by the private sector themselves – there is a lot going on.

However, as outlined in the Vision for Growing Mid Wales document, more needs to be done, particularly in the case of Mid Wales. The National Infrastructure Commission Wales recently published a comprehensive report from their recent work looking at these issues nationally: [National Infrastructure Commission for Wales: Transport - Discussion Document \(gov.wales\)](https://www.gov.wales/government/infrastructure/national-infrastructure-commission-wales-transport-discussion-document)

Specifically in the context of the Mid Wales Growth Deal, it is about understanding fully where that effort is best placed in the context of Government policy and funded programmes, and the plans and rollout of the private sector. The Mid Wales Growth Deal is a finite funding tool, that has specific objectives to grow the economy, and needs to demonstrate additionality. It is determining the best approach to utilise the Growth Deal to catalyse and leverage investment in digital connectivity in Mid Wales in a much more comprehensive manner, than just delivering a single project or programme without full awareness of the context or environment it is trying to change.

We have recently appointed Spirit Public Sector Ltd to produce a scoping document outlining possible intervention projects for the Digital Connectivity theme. Spirit has a long experience of working on digital infrastructure projects, at local and central government level. They worked recently on the highly successful approaches in Pembrokeshire and Northern Ireland.

By the end of March 2021, the commission will deliver a scoping document that is the first part of the Strategic Outline Case. It will focus on the strategic case for change, the longlist of interventions, and the approach to selecting appropriate interventions.

Developing the digital themes from the Vision for Growing Mid Wales, the document will provide further detail about the drivers for better digital infrastructure, and the value to the community of delivering improvements more quickly.

The document will set out the current situation, and the current and expected programmes of work that aim to address the problem. It will outline the expected trajectory, and the likely scope and success of those programmes, outlining the scale of the expected gap and considering the role Growing Mid Wales can play in eliminating it.

The document will explore the underlying reasons for poor digital infrastructure in the region, identifying the factors that will need to be tackled to drive better provision. It will consider the supply side and demand side barriers, and the features of the digital infrastructure market, including likely future developments.

The work will develop a longlist of potential interventions to resolve the gaps identified by addressing the barriers to better provision. Using the drivers for better infrastructure as a basis, the document will propose a method of selecting the preferred option, and consider how the longlist will be refined through shortlisting to identify the way forward.

Since the commercial, financial and management arrangements have some bearing on the scope of proposed interventions, these areas will be considered at a high level in the document. They will be further developed in a subsequent commission.

Spirit will engage with a range of stakeholders, including Welsh and UK government contacts, commercial providers, and neighbouring authorities, to capture inputs from a wide range of informed participants. It will also bring its experience from similar successful engagements in other locations.

The Spirit team will work closely with the officer steering group to develop the scoping document. Weekly progress calls and regular briefings will be used to ensure that the project delivers the required outputs on time and budget.

Carwyn Jones-Evans, Strategic Manager – Mid Wales Growth Deal
Guy Middleton – Spirit Public Sector Ltd

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