

<b>Title of Report:</b>	<b>FFNI Operational Costs</b>
<b>Committee Report Submitted To:</b>	The Leisure & Development Committee
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	16 <sup>th</sup> March 2021
<b>For Decision or For Information</b>	For Decision

<b>Linkage to Council Strategy (2019-23)</b>	
Strategic Theme	Innovation & Transformation Accelerating our Economy and Contributing to Prosperity
Outcome	The Council will embrace new technologies and processes where they can bring about better experiences for citizens and visitors. Promoting the Borough as an attractive place to live, work, invest and visit.
Lead Officer	Strategic Projects Manager

<b>Budgetary Considerations</b>	
Cost of Proposal	£19,853.30
Included in Current Year Estimates	Yes
Capital/Revenue	Revenue
Code	
Staffing Costs	N/A

<b>Screening Requirements</b>	Required for new or revised Policies, Plans, Strategies or Service Delivery Proposals.		
Section 75 Screening	Screening Completed:	No	Date:
	EQIA Required and Completed:	No	Date:
Rural Needs Assessment (RNA)	Screening Completed	No	Date:
	RNA Required and Completed:	No	Date:
Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA)	Screening Completed:	No	Date:
	DPIA Required and Completed:	No	Date:

## 1.0 Purpose of Report

**To highlight to Elected Members the additional contribution requested from Council to fund the Full Fibre NI (FFNI) Operations team.**

## 2.0 Background

The FFNI (Full Fibre Northern Ireland) Consortium is made up of the 10 rural councils outside of Belfast and another central government public body, the Business Services Organisation. The project is hosted by Newry, Mourne and Down District Council.

The Consortium has made a successful collective bid for £24m to support digital infrastructure development across Northern Ireland from two funding programmes managed by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS).

FFNI secured £15m of funding in February 2019 under the Local Full Fibre Networks Challenge Fund and in September 2019, the project made a further successful application for £9m of funding under the Rural Gigabit Capable (RGC) programme.

The LFFN and RGC project will connect approximately 969 public sector buildings, ensuring that almost all Council, Health, Fire and Rescue sites in Northern Ireland have access to future-proofed fibre connectivity. The commercial model offers FFNI partners the opportunities for improved digital transformation, service improvements and network cost savings through its design for each partner.

Unlike Project Stratum, which is a state aid project and fixes a major rural problem using government funding directly, FFNI uses these public sector sites as hubs to further improve, accelerate and stimulate full fibre rollout by increasing the locations in scope for commercial fibre investment.

The FFNI projects (LFFN & RGC) form a key part of a larger £52m intervention that will introduce ultrafast connections to members' sites and will provide fibre connectivity to an estimated 368,594 premises across Northern Ireland.

Within Causeway Coast and Glens, the aim is to connect approximately 91 public sector buildings with ultrafast 1000Gb connections. Deadlines for project completion are March 2021 for Rural Gigabit Connectivity (RGC) sites and September 2021 for FFNI sites.

For the Council's geographical area, the funding is expected to deliver fibre connectivity to 56 of the Council's own sites, and 35 Business Services Organisation (BSO) sites. The BSO sites will use the grant funding to connect Health (Doctors' surgeries for example), Fire and Ambulance sites.

## 3.0 Benefits of the Programme

The FFNI programme will bring several benefits to residents and businesses and to the public sector partners:

- **Improved Economic Performance:** through better and more widespread digital infrastructure provision enabling more businesses to locate and grow, increasing sustainable employment opportunities, and attracting high value jobs for individuals who in turn make financial contributions into the local economy.

*Related benefit:* An estimated GVA improvement of £180m in Northern Ireland's economy over the next 15 years.

- **Improved individual wellbeing & community cohesion:** by enabling better and more digitally connected individuals, communities and society at large.

*Related benefit:* Reduced social exclusion as more individuals and groups typically in rural areas will have the ability to digitally connect with each other.

- **Improved Public Sector service efficiency and delivery:** by enabling Causeway Coast and Glens to work more efficiently and cost effectively, confident in the knowledge that Council has enough bandwidth to support delivery, and citizens have enough bandwidth to receive the services.

*Related benefits:* Reduced operating costs by moving more council services available online. Improved quality and customer satisfaction by creating more accessible services for users, as well as improving the ways in which citizens can contact the council. Improved delivery and quality of Council Services such as CCTV and telephony, and future smart technologies, which are reliant on high quality bandwidth.

- **Greater environmental benefit:** through a reduction in the need to travel for work purposes.

*Related benefit:* A reduction in CO2 emissions, which has not been quantified at this time.

#### **4.0 Key Issues**

The FFNI Operations Team has been faced with a series of extremely complex and technical issues associated with the procurement process and risks in relation to the FFNI infrastructure. The impact of this has been that additional funding for the centralised operations team required is higher than the value originally anticipated.

The programme end date has also been extended due to external delays from September 2021 to December 2021. Whilst this is to be welcomed in terms of a longer delivery period, funding for the Operations Team (officers & consultancy) is not available for this extension.

Newry, Mourne and Down District Council has written to all of the FFNI Consortium members requesting that a further contribution of £19,853.30 is made towards the Operations Team and future management costs.

#### **5.0 Recommendations**

It is recommended that Council fund Causeway Coast and Glen's contribution of £19,853.30 towards the FFNI Operations Team to ensure delivery of the programme and sites by the programme end date (31<sup>st</sup> December 2021).