OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Delegated Decisions by Cabinet Member for Environment and Economy

Friday, 11 September 2026 at 1.00 pm
Online

If you wish to view proceedings, please click on this Live Stream Link.
However, that will not allow you to participate in the meeting.

Items for Decision

The items for decision under individual Cabinet Members' delegated powers are listed overleaf, with indicative timings, and the related reports are attached. Decisions taken will become effective at the end of the working day on Wednesday 16 September unless called in by that date for review by the appropriate Scrutiny Committee.

Copies of the reports are circulated (by e-mail) to all members of the County Council.

These proceedings are open to the public

Martin Reeves OBE
Chief Executive

September 2026

Committee Officer: ***Jack Ahier***
Email: committeesdemocraticservices@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Note: Date of next meeting: 9 October 2026

If you have any special requirements (such as a large print version of these papers or special access facilities) please contact the officer named on the front page, but please give as much notice as possible before the meeting.

Items for Decision

1. Declarations of Interest

See guidance note below.

2. Questions from County Councillors

Any county councillor may, by giving notice to the Proper Officer by 9 am three working days before the meeting, ask a question on an item on the agenda.

The number of questions which may be asked by any councillor at any one meeting is limited to two (or one question with notice and a supplementary question at the meeting) and the time for questions will be limited to 30 minutes in total. As with questions at Council, any questions which remain unanswered at the end of this item will receive a written response.

Questions submitted prior to the agenda being despatched are shown below and will be the subject of a response from the appropriate Cabinet Member or such other councillor or officer as is determined by the Cabinet Member, and shall not be the subject of further debate at this meeting. Questions received after the despatch of the agenda, but before the deadline, will be shown on the Schedule of Addenda circulated at the meeting, together with any written response which is available at that time.

3. Petitions and Public Address

Members of the public who wish to speak on an item on the agenda at this meeting, or present a petition, can attend the meeting in person or 'virtually' through an online connection.

Requests to present a petition must be submitted no later than 9am ten working days before the meeting.

Requests to speak must be submitted no later than 9am three working days before the meeting.

Requests should be submitted to committeesdemocraticservices@oxfordshire.gov.uk

If you are speaking 'virtually', you may submit a written statement of your presentation to ensure that if the technology fails, then your views can still be taken into account. A written copy of your statement can be provided no later than 9am on the day of the meeting. Written submissions should be no longer than 1 A4 sheet.

4. Minutes of the Previous Meeting (Pages 7 - 8)

To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 10 July 2026 and for the Chair to sign them as a correct record.

5. Updating Thresholds for Section 19 Flood Investigation Reports
(Pages 9 - 20)

Cabinet Member: Environment and Economy
Forward Plan Ref: 2026/105
Key Decision
Contact: James Linnane, Senior Flood Risk Management Officer

Report by Director of Economy and Place (**CMDEE5**).

To consider proposals to update the Section 19 Flood Investigation reports.

The Cabinet Member is RECOMMENDED to:

a) **Recognise the statutory duties of the Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA) under Section 19 of the Flood and Water Management Act 2010, including the role of thresholds in triggering formal investigations.**

b) **Acknowledge the extent of the 2024 flooding events and the significant number of Section 19 flood investigations undertaken.**

c) **Consider the findings of the review of current Section 19 thresholds, informed by analysis of recent investigations and their effectiveness.**

d) **Approve the proposed simplification and update of the thresholds for initiating Section 19 investigations to support clearer, more consistent, and timely decision-making.**

6. DSIT 5G Innovation Regions Project – England's Connected Heartland (Pages 21 - 32)

Cabinet Member: Environment and Economy
Forward Plan Ref: 2026/178
Key Decision
Contact: Craig Bower, Programme Director – Digital Connectivity

Report by Director of Economy and Place (**CMDEE6**).

Request to authorise delegated approval of change control to an increase the programme budget to £6.14M by change control by acceptance of £0.54M of additional grant funding and additional ringfenced Digital Infrastructure gainshare of £0.9M due to an extension of the project timelines to as a result of technical challenges which have required design changes.

The Cabinet Member is RECOMMENDED to:

a) **Approve acceptance of two additional Department for Science, Innovation and Technology grant payments for the 5G Innovations Regions Project, totalling £540,000, increasing the total grant funding for the programme to £4,340,000.**

b) Approve an additional £900,000 investment from the Digital Infrastructure Gainshare fund, increasing total Gainshare funding for the programme to £1,800,000 and the overall programme budget to £6,140,000;

c) Delegate authority to the Director of Economy and Place in consultation with the Section 151 Officer and the Head of Legal and Governance Services to finalise the associated funding contract changes within the approved budget envelope.

Councillors declaring interests

General duty

You must declare any disclosable pecuniary interests when the meeting reaches the item on the agenda headed ‘Declarations of Interest’ or as soon as it becomes apparent to you.

What is a disclosable pecuniary interest?

Disclosable pecuniary interests relate to your employment; sponsorship (i.e. payment for expenses incurred by you in carrying out your duties as a councillor or towards your election expenses); contracts; land in the Council’s area; licenses for land in the Council’s area; corporate tenancies; and securities. These declarations must be recorded in each councillor’s Register of Interests which is publicly available on the Council’s website.

Disclosable pecuniary interests that must be declared are not only those of the member her or himself but also those member’s spouse, civil partner or person they are living with as husband or wife or as if they were civil partners.

Declaring an interest

Where any matter disclosed in your Register of Interests is being considered at a meeting, you must declare that you have an interest. You should also disclose the nature as well as the existence of the interest. If you have a disclosable pecuniary interest, after having declared it at the meeting you must not participate in discussion or voting on the item and must withdraw from the meeting whilst the matter is discussed.

Members’ Code of Conduct and public perception

Even if you do not have a disclosable pecuniary interest in a matter, the Members’ Code of Conduct says that a member ‘must serve only the public interest and must never improperly confer an advantage or disadvantage on any person including yourself’ and that ‘you must not place yourself in situations where your honesty and integrity may be questioned’.

Members Code – Other registrable interests

Where a matter arises at a meeting which directly relates to the financial interest or wellbeing of one of your other registerable interests then you must declare an interest. You must not participate in discussion or voting on the item and you must withdraw from the meeting whilst the matter is discussed.

Wellbeing can be described as a condition of contentedness, healthiness and happiness; anything that could be said to affect a person’s quality of life, either positively or negatively, is likely to affect their wellbeing.
Other registrable interests include:

a) Any unpaid directorships

b) Any body of which you are a member or are in a position of general control or management and to which you are nominated or appointed by your authority.
c) Any body (i) exercising functions of a public nature (ii) directed to charitable purposes or (iii) one of whose principal purposes includes the influence of public opinion or policy (including any political party or trade union) of which you are a member or in a position of general control or management.

Members Code – Non-registrable interests
Where a matter arises at a meeting which directly relates to your financial interest or wellbeing (and does not fall under disclosable pecuniary interests), or the financial interest or wellbeing of a relative or close associate, you must declare the interest.

Where a matter arises at a meeting which affects your own financial interest or wellbeing, a financial interest or wellbeing of a relative or close associate or a financial interest or wellbeing of a body included under other registrable interests, then you must declare the interest.

In order to determine whether you can remain in the meeting after disclosing your interest the following test should be applied:
Where a matter affects the financial interest or well-being:
a) to a greater extent than it affects the financial interests of the majority of inhabitants of the ward affected by the decision and;
b) a reasonable member of the public knowing all the facts would believe that it would affect your view of the wider public interest.

You may speak on the matter only if members of the public are also allowed to speak at the meeting. Otherwise you must not take part in any discussion or vote on the matter and must not remain in the room unless you have been granted a dispensation.

DELEGATED DECISIONS BY CABINET MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENT AND ECONOMY

MINUTES of the meeting held on Friday, 10 July 2026 commencing at 1.00 pm and finishing at 1.05 pm

Present:

Voting Members: Councillor Laura Gordon – in the Chair

Officers: Jack Ahier (Senior Democratic Services Officer), Sarah Gilbert (Head of Climate Action).

The Cabinet Member considered the matters, reports and recommendations contained or referred to in the agenda for the meeting [, together with a schedule of addenda tabled at the meeting/the following additional documents:] and agreed as set out below. Copies of the agenda and reports [agenda, reports and schedule/additional documents] are attached to the signed Minutes.

7 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST
(Agenda No. 1)

There were none.

8 QUESTIONS FROM COUNTY COUNCILLORS
(Agenda No. 2)

There were none.

9 PETITIONS AND PUBLIC ADDRESS
(Agenda No. 3)

There were none.

10 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING
(Agenda No. 4)

The minutes of the meeting held on 19 June 2026 were approved and were signed by the Chair as a correct record.

11 CARBON MANAGEMENT PLAN AND GREENHOUSE GAS REPORT
(Agenda No. 5)

The Chair introduced the item to the meeting.

Officers confirmed that the Council had a commitment to be net zero on its own estate by 2030. The Carbon Management plan managed emissions across the Council's estate, such as its fleet, electrical assets (streetlighting) and staff travel.

Officers confirmed that the programme was being accelerated regarding the Council's vehicles as delivery had largely been focused on property.

The Chair noted the dip that had occurred despite the Council meeting its targets and noted the interim figures for 2025/26 was starting the close the gap once more. It was confirmed that what estates would look like would be revisited post-local government reorganisation.

The Chair thanked officers and agreed to the recommendations in the report.

RESOLVED to:

a) **Note and approve the 2026 updated Carbon Management Plan (CMP) including the updated emissions trajectory for publication.**

b) **Note and approve the 2024/25 Greenhouse Gas (GHG) report for publication.**

.... in the Chair

Date of signing 200

Divisions Affected – All

DELEGATED DECISIONS BY CABINET MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENT AND ECONOMY

11 SEPTEMBER 2026

Section 19 Flood Investigations Threshold Update

Report by Director of Economy and Place

RECOMMENDATION

The Cabinet Member is RECOMMENDED to:

a) **Recognise the statutory duties of the Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA) under Section 19 of the Flood and Water Management Act 2010, including the role of thresholds in triggering formal investigations.**

b) **Acknowledge the extent of the 2024 flooding events and the significant number of Section 19 flood investigations undertaken.**

c) **Consider the findings of the review of current Section 19 thresholds, informed by analysis of recent investigations and their effectiveness.**

d) **Approve the proposed simplification and update of the thresholds for initiating Section 19 investigations to support clearer, more consistent, and timely decision-making.**

Executive Summary

1. Oxfordshire County Council, in its role as LLFA, has a statutory duty under Section 19 of the Flood and Water Management Act 2010 to investigate significant flood events, identify the responsible Risk Management Authorities (RMAs), and publish the findings.

2. To meet this duty, the LLFA has established thresholds that determine when a formal Section 19 Flood Investigation Report is undertaken. These reports assess the causes and impacts of flooding and provide recommendations to RMAs to reduce the risk of future events. While these recommendations support coordination and action, they are not enforceable.

3. Following the widespread flooding in 2024, over 50 Section 19 flood investigation reports have been produced across Oxfordshire, providing

valuable evidence to target vulnerable locations, support partnership working, and encourage mitigation measures.

4. A review of current Section 19 thresholds, informed by analysis of completed and ongoing investigations to better understand triggering factors and where they add the most value, has highlighted the need to update the thresholds in order to:

- Reflect improved experience and understanding gained from recent flood events
- Reduce complexity and subjectivity in decision-making
- Enable faster and more consistent decisions on whether to initiate an investigation
- Ensure alignment with available resources and national guidance

5. Based on testing against the 2024 flood events, the revised thresholds would have resulted in a similar number of externally completed investigations (a marginal reduction from 43 to 42), indicating that the changes improve efficiency without materially reducing coverage or service level.

Background

6. Oxfordshire County Council, in its role as LLFA, has a statutory duty under Section 19 of the Flood and Water Management Act 2010 to investigate significant flood events, identify the responsible RMAs, and publish the findings. This investigation is to be done to the extent the LLFA considers necessary or appropriate and results of the investigation must be published.

7. To meet this duty, as the LLFA, OCC has established thresholds that determine when a formal Section 19 Flood Investigation Report is undertaken. These reports assess the causes and impacts of flooding and provide recommendations to RMAs to reduce the risk of future events. While these recommendations support coordination and action, they are not enforceable.

8. Following the widespread flooding in 2024, over 50 Section 19 flood investigation reports have been produced across Oxfordshire, providing valuable evidence to target high-risk locations, support partnership working, and encourage mitigation measures.

Proposed Changes

9. The LLFA is proposing to simplify its current Section 19 flood investigation thresholds in order to:

- Reflect improved experience and understanding gained from recent flood events
- Reduce complexity and subjectivity in decision-making
- Enable faster and more consistent decisions on whether to initiate an investigation

- Ensure alignment with available resources and national guidance

10. The review is informed by analysis of previously completed and ongoing Section 19 flood investigation reports to better understand what has triggered investigations and where they add the most value.
11. The proposed updates aim to streamline criteria while maintaining focus on significant impacts. A summary of the updates can be found in the below table.

Current Threshold	Proposed Updated Threshold
Has internal flooding (excluding basements) of five or more residential properties or businesses been experienced within an area of 1km^2	*Internal flooding of five or more residential properties or businesses has been experienced - considering properties within an area of 1km^2. Excluding non-habited areas such as cellars, garages or outbuildings.*
Has internal flooding of a business premises employing more than 10 people been experienced within an area of 1km^2	*Internal flooding of two or more business premises has been experienced - considering premises within an area of 1km2.*
Has internal flooding (excluding basements) of at least one property or business been experienced for one week or longer.	*Has internal flooding (excluding basements) of at least one property or business been experienced for one week or longer.*
Has flooding of one or more items of critical infrastructure, which could include hospitals, health centres, clinics, surgeries, colleges, schools, day nurseries, nursing homes, emergency services (police, fire, ambulance) stations, utilities and substations, been experienced.	*Flooding of one or more items of critical infrastructure, which could include hospitals, health centres, clinics, surgeries, colleges, schools, day nurseries, nursing homes, emergency services (police, fire, ambulance) stations, utilities and substations.*
Caused a transport link to be impassable for the following periods: • *Motorways, trunk roads and major rail links – 2 hours or more* • *Class A and B highways and other rail links – 4 hours or more* • *Class C highways – 10 hours or more unless the route is the only means of access, or is primary route for critical infrastructure then this is reduced to 4 hours.* • *Class U highways – 24 hours or more unless the route is the only means of access, or is primary route for critical infrastructure then this is reduced to 4 hours.*	*Flooding results in critical road or rail routes being impassible for 24 hours. These include motorways, trunk roads and major links, Class A and B highways, critical road may include roads that due to flooding can cut off towns/villages.*

12. A more detailed table, highlighting the current thresholds, proposed updated thresholds, and reasoning for proposing the changes is available in Annex A.

Expected Outcomes and National Guidance

13. The proposed changes do not alter the scope or content of Section 19 reports but are intended to:

- Simplify and accelerate decision-making
- Improve clarity and transparency of when investigations are undertaken
- Better reflect real-world flood impacts and local circumstances

14. Based on testing against 2024 flood events, the revised thresholds would have resulted in a similar number of externally completed investigations (a marginal reduction from 43 to 42), indicating that the changes improve efficiency without materially reducing coverage.

15. A table outlining considered changes to thresholds, along with their potential impact on the number of Section 19 flood investigations in 2024, is provided in Annex B.

16. The Flood and Water Management Act (2010) does not state what LLFAs must set their thresholds as, however, in April 2025 DEFRA published a guidance document on LLFAs conducting Section 19 flood investigation reports.

17. The updated thresholds consider this DEFRA guidance and the example criteria within it and apply it in a way that reflects what is measurable and proportionate in an Oxfordshire context. This guidance document can be found in the 'other documents' section of this report under the title 'Investigating a flood: guidance for lead local flood authorities'.

Corporate Policies and Priorities

18. The proposals ensure we continue to support the Corporate Strategy in its aspirations around Greener Oxfordshire by developing work on community led initiatives and locally specific works.

19. The proposed updates also ensure we continue to deliver various objectives and measures in the Local Flood Risk Management Strategy including:

    (a) Objective 1: Improve understanding of flood risks and ensure that all stakeholders understand their roles and responsibilities for flood risk management.
    (b) Objective 2: Take a collaborative approach to reducing flood risks, using all available resources and funds in an integrated way and in so doing manage and reduce overall flood risk.

Financial Implications

20. This proposal relates to the refinement of existing Section 19 flood investigation thresholds rather than the introduction of a new policy or programme. The anticipated number of investigations is expected to remain broadly consistent with previous years after comparing the current thresholds against the proposed for the 2024 flood events.

21. The cost of undertaking Section 19 flood investigation reports is met from the Flood Risk Management Team's core budget (NTH310), within which £60,000 is allocated annually for this purpose.

22. Since the 2024 flood events, the Flood Risk Management Team has increased its internal resource, enabling more Section 19 flood investigation reports to be delivered in-house in the future.

23. Demand remains inherently difficult to predict, as it is driven by the occurrence and severity of flooding incidents. However, the team is now better resourced to respond to any increase in demand than in 2024, and Section 19 flood investigation reports are prioritised above other workstreams.

24. In the event of a significant flooding event, reports may take longer to complete due to the volume of work. There is also flexibility to manage this pressure by spreading the budget for a single year across a two-year period if required.

25. The scenario modelling in Annex B sets out a range of potential adjustments to the thresholds, alongside the associated financial implications in terms of changes to the number of Section 19 reports that would be produced. Of the three scenarios presented in Annex B, the preferred option is broadly cost-neutral. It results in a marginal saving of £3,837, reflecting one fewer Section 19 report being undertaken under the revised thresholds compared to the current approach.

26. This scenario modelling is based on an average cost for completing a Section 19 investigation report. This has been calculated using the number of reports completed by District and City councils in 2024, alongside the total costs charged to the County Council for undertaking those investigations over the same period.

27. As a result, no additional financial implications are expected, and delivery is anticipated to continue within existing resources and budgets.

Comments checked by:

Matthew Kocak, Finance Business Partnering Manager

Legal Implications

28. Section 19 of the Flood and Water Management Act 2010 states that the LLFA must, to the extent it considers it necessary or appropriate, investigate floods in its area. The updated threshold enable the LLFA to set out how it proposes to exercise that duty.

29. The Flood and Water Management Act (2010) does not state what LLFAs must set their thresholds as, however, in April 2025 DEFRA published a guidance document on LLFAs conducting Section 19 flood investigation reports called "Investigating a flood: guidance for lead local flood authorities: How to conduct flood investigations under section 19 of the Flood and Water Management Act 2010".

30. The updated thresholds consider this DEFRA guidance and the example criteria within it and apply it in a way that reflects what is measurable and proportionate in an Oxfordshire context.

Comments checked by:

Jennifer Crouch, Principal Solicitor (Regulatory)

Staff Implications

31. These changes are expected to have only a minor impact on business-as-usual activities and the number of formal Section 19 flood investigations.

32. It is proposed that delivery will continue through the existing approach, which enables formal Section 19 flood investigations to be undertaken by the Flood Risk Management team, by District Councils under Agency Agreements, or in cases of high workload, by consultants. The Agency Agreement between the Districts and city Council and the County Council enables the District Council to undertake initial flood investigations on behalf of the LLFA. The investigation of flood incidents is included within the scope of this agreement and where resource permits, also draft the Section 19 flood investigation report.

33. Additional funding for resources was provided on a permanent basis for two additional officers with the Flood Risk Management Team in FY2025/26. These were successfully recruited to and commenced at the end of 2025. They are currently providing the co-ordination of the Section 19 recommendations and flood warden promotion as well as developing a communications plan. The County Council do not envisage additional resource requirements to implement these updated thresholds.

Equality & Inclusion Implications

34. The proposals set out in this report have been considered against the Council's equality duties. Flood risk and the impacts of flooding can disproportionately affect some groups.

35. As with previous Section 19 flood investigations, engagement with communities will be inclusive and proportionate, using accessible formats and existing local networks where appropriate.

36. On this basis, the proposals are not expected to have a negative impact on any protected group. A full Equality Impact Assessment is not considered necessary at this stage; however, equality considerations will continue to be reviewed.

Sustainability Implications

37. The proposals set out in this report will result in only minor changes to the LLFA's current Section 19 flood investigation process. They also present positive sustainability and climate adaptation benefits, alongside social advantages through improved community preparedness and resilience.

38. The current Section 19 flood investigation process identifies causes and potential mitigations measures, which often include features linked to drainage improvements, asset maintenance and Natural Flood Management.

39. These measures can lead to reduced environmental damage from repeated flooding, better water attenuation and management, and nature-based solutions that look towards longer-term, sustainable flood management.

40. The proposals are consistent with the Council's climate and ecological commitments and support a sustainable, preventative approach to flood risk management. As this proposal requests the adjustment of existing Section 19 thresholds rather than introducing a new policy or programme with additional emissions impacts, a separate Climate Impact Assessment is not required.

Risk Management

Risk	Description	Mitigation	H/M/L
Lack of team resource to deliver Section 19 flood investigation reports	Delays in launching or completing Section 19 flood investigations	Have dedicated resources available within the team, an Agency Agreement set up with District Councils and the opportunity for consultants to be commissioned for work during high workloads.	M
Lack of powers to enforce other RMAs to undertake recommendations	Recommendations are not delivered	Discuss and track recommendations pro-actively with the recommendation owners to encourage delivery	M

Consultations

41. The five District Councils were all consulted and given the chance to comment on the changes to the Section 19 flood investigation thresholds. Apart from the District Councils, there has been no other external consultation in relation this proposal.

Robin Rogers
Director of Economy and Place

Annex A: Current and proposed Section 19 flood investigation thresholds
Annex B: Effect of some considered changes to thresholds based on S19s from 2024 completed by consultants and districts councils on behalf of the LLFA.

Other Documents:

- Floods and Water Management Act 2010
- Local Flood Risk Management Strategy
- Oxfordshire County council Corporate Strategy
- Investigating a flood: guidance for lead local flood authorities

Contact Officer: James Linnane, Flood Risk Management Team.

July 2026

Annex A – Current and Proposed Section 19 Flood Investigation Thresholds

Current Threshold	Proposed Updated Threshold	Proposed Change and Reasoning
Has internal flooding (excluding basements) of five or more residential properties or businesses been experienced within an area of $1km^2$	*Internal flooding of five or more residential properties or businesses has been experienced - considering properties within an area of $1km^2$. Excluding non-habited areas such as cellars, garages or outbuildings.*	We are continuing to retain the 5 properties internally flooded but making the $1km^2$ more of a guide. We have had locations where 5 properties were flooded in $1km^{2,}$ but they were in very separate catchments and from different sources of flooding which makes grouping these confusing. This update to the threshold will allow us group by catchment/source of flooding.
Has internal flooding of a business premises employing more than 10 people been experienced within an area of $1km^2$	*Internal flooding of two or more business premises has been experienced - considering premises within an area of 1km2.*	We are proposing to increase the threshold for business flooding from 1 to 2 commercial properties internally flooded and to remove the onerous requirement to have a certain number of employees. We have observed that individual businesses are often able to manage flooding independently, making the co-ordination of roles and responsibilities less critical in such cases. However, where multiple businesses are affected within the same area, there is a greater need for coordinated action and clear alignment of responsibilities.
Has internal flooding (excluding basements) of at least one property or business been experienced for one week or longer	*Has internal flooding (excluding basements) of at least one property or business been experienced for one week or longer*	No change.
Has flooding of one or more items of critical infrastructure, which could include hospitals, health centres, clinics, surgeries, colleges, schools, day nurseries, nursing homes, emergency services (police, fire, ambulance) stations, utilities and substations, been experienced.	*Flooding of one or more items of critical infrastructure, which could include hospitals, health centres, clinics, surgeries, colleges, schools, day nurseries, nursing homes, emergency services (police, fire, ambulance) stations, utilities and substations.*	No change.

Caused a transport link to be impassable for the following periods: • *Motorways, trunk roads and major rail links – 2 hours or more* • *Class A and B highways and other rail links – 4 hours or more* • *Class C highways – 10 hours or more unless the route is the only means of access, or is primary route for critical infrastructure then this is reduced to 4 hours.* • *Class U highways – 24 hours or more unless the route is the only means of access, or is primary route for critical infrastructure then this is reduced to 4 hours.*	*Flooding results in critical road or rail routes being impassible for 24 hours. These include motorways, trunk roads and major links, Class A and B highways, critical road may include roads that due to flooding can cut off towns/villages.*	We are proposing to remove the more complex threshold requirements for highway flooding, where reliable measurement is not readily achievable. This will be replaced with a single criterion, identifying instances where critical routes are flooded for 24 hours or more. We have found that routes which effectively cut off a village are of particular importance to residents. This revised approach ensures such impacts continue to be captured, while simplifying the overall criteria. Major roads (eg. M40/A34), rail links or Highway that experience reoccurring flooding for under 24 hours are investigated by the relevant authority (Network Rail, National Highways etc). These organisations are responsible for understanding the cause of flooding and implementing any mitigation measures. Where appropriate OCC flood risk management team will support these investigations but a formal S19 report will not be required.

Annex B – Effect of some considered changes to thresholds based on S19s from 2024 completed by consultants and districts councils on behalf of the LLFA.

A number of threshold update options were considered, with their respective impacts on overall figures and associated costs outlined below. Having assessed the advantages and implications of each option, Option 3 was selected as a preferred approach. It results in only a marginal change to the overall figures while providing indirect cost savings, representing the most balanced and efficient update to the threshold criteria.

Considered threshold change	Investigation number based on current threshold	Investigation number based on considered change	Estimated change in costs based on estimated cost per S19 (£3,837).
Increasing the threshold from 5 to 10 for number of properties internally flooded	43	10	-£126,627
Reducing the threshold to 1 for number of properties internally flooded	43	466	+£1.6m
Increasing the number for commercial properties flooded from 1 to 2 and remove ambiguous requirement for the number of employees	43	42	-£3,837

Note: Over 2 years, we spent £165k on Section 19 investigations carried out by consultants and District Councils. In 2024, 52 reports were completed in total, with 9 completed internally, so the figures in the table reflect 43 externally commissioned investigations. This works out at roughly £3,837 per report.

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Divisions Affected - All

DELEGATED DECISIONS BY CABINET MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENT AND ECONOMY

11 September 2026

DSIT 5G Innovations Regions Project (England's Connected Heartland)

Report by Director of Economy and Place

RECOMMENDATION

The Cabinet Member is RECOMMENDED to:

a) **Approve acceptance of two additional Department for Science, Innovation and Technology grant payments for the 5G Innovations Regions Project, totalling £540,000, increasing the total grant funding for the programme to £4,340,000.**

b) **Approve an additional £900,000 investment from the Digital Infrastructure Gainshare fund, increasing total Gainshare funding for the programme to £1,800,000 and the overall programme budget to £6,140,000;**

c) **Delegate authority to the Director of Economy and Place in consultation with the Section 151 Officer and the Head of Legal and Governance Services to finalise the associated funding contract changes within the approved budget envelope.**

Executive Summary

2. This report seeks approval to increase the budget for the England's Connected Heartland (ECH) programme by £1.44 million, funded through a combination of additional grant funding from the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT) and Digital Infrastructure Gainshare funding. The additional investment is required to address unforeseen technical and site-related challenges encountered during delivery of the programme's two flagship 5G infrastructure projects and to ensure that both schemes achieve their intended coverage, benefits and long-term commercial viability.

3. If approved, the total ECH programme budget will increase to £6.14 million, comprising £4.34 million of DSIT grant funding and £1.80 million of Digital

Infrastructure Gainshare funding. Forecast expenditure is £4.81 million capital and £1.33 million revenue.

4. Digital Infrastructure Gainshare funding is generated from revenue-sharing arrangements associated with the Better Broadband for Oxfordshire contract. These funds are ringfenced for reinvestment in projects that support the furtherance of digital infrastructure across Oxfordshire.

5. This decision request follows approval by cabinet on 19 December 2023 to accept a Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT) grant of £3.80 million awarded to OCC for funding the England's Connected Heartland (ECH) programme. The December 2023 decision also authorised the use of the gainshare funding held in ringfenced reserves for the purpose of supporting digital infrastructure projects.

6. On 16 July 2024 cabinet further agreed to authorise the commensurate award contracts for managed 5G private network services for each of the two capital projects forming the project known as England's Connected Heartland (ECH) for a combined value of the DSIT capital grant of £3.8 million plus a £0.9 million drawdown of Gainshare funding.

7. Both capital project requirements have been subject to an Open Procedure procurement, and the two contracts were awarded (to Vodafone and AWTG) following a successful formal open competitive procurement process. The two capital projects comprise a 5G Private Mobile Network (MPN) for Harwell Science and Innovation campus, and a 5G MPN for deployment along the new stretch of East West Rail between Bicester and Bletchley.

8. Following award, detailed design surveys and delivery planning identified a number of technical complexities and site constraints which were not apparent during the initial feasibility and procurement stages. Addressing these issues has required significant redesign work and generated additional delivery costs to ensure the necessary coverage requirements for both projects.

Exempt Information

9. N/A – contract award notices are in the public domain and will be subsequently updated to reflect any changes made.

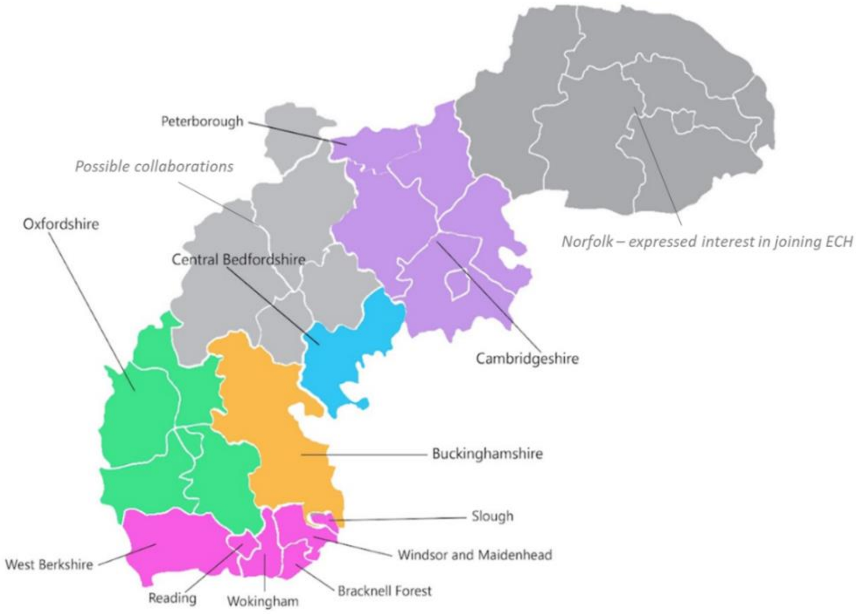
Context and Background

10. **Digital Infrastructure** comprises fixed broadband connectivity and mobile voice/data connectivity along with connected assets such as Internet of Things (IoT) devices. Wide availability and access to good connectivity in the internet age is critical for a huge array of public and private sector services to be delivered productively and frequently can be linked to both clean economic growth and carbon reduction by mitigating the need for travel.

11. **Oxfordshire Digital Infrastructure Programme (DIP)** has been in place since 2014. The initial focus was fixing the chronic lack of broadband infrastructure across Oxfordshire. The core project was known as Better Broadband for Oxfordshire Better Broadband for Oxfordshire | Digital Infrastructure Programme (digitalinfrastructureoxfordshire.co.uk) delivered access to superfast broadband for 100,000 homes and businesses over a period of six years. The delivery contract with Openreach was constructed as a profit-share where Openreach paid OCC a proportion of revenue earned predicated on take-up of services by our residents. This adoption rate has reached over 80% and allowed for DIP to accrue a fund known as gainshare which is ringfenced for further investment the council wishes to make in digital infrastructure. The programme has delivered several other projects since 2014, including Businesses in Rural Oxfordshire (BIRO) a Top-up Gigabit Voucher Scheme (GVS), & GigaHubs. DIP has more recently focussed on improving mobile infrastructure as wireless connectivity becomes more strategically important, especially with the advent of 5G. The programme is self-funded with all staff costs drawn from the Gainshare fund, as well as providing the source of capital needed to support other digital infrastructure projects either as direct funding, augmenting other central government grants (match funding), or financially underwriting capital projects which have revenue generation/cost saving potential.

12. **England's Connected Heartland** is the regional partnership comprising the Local Authorities in the map below. The partnership was formed and is led by Oxfordshire County Council and is underwritten by a Memorandum of Understanding. There are scheduled partner activities and a Partnership Board.

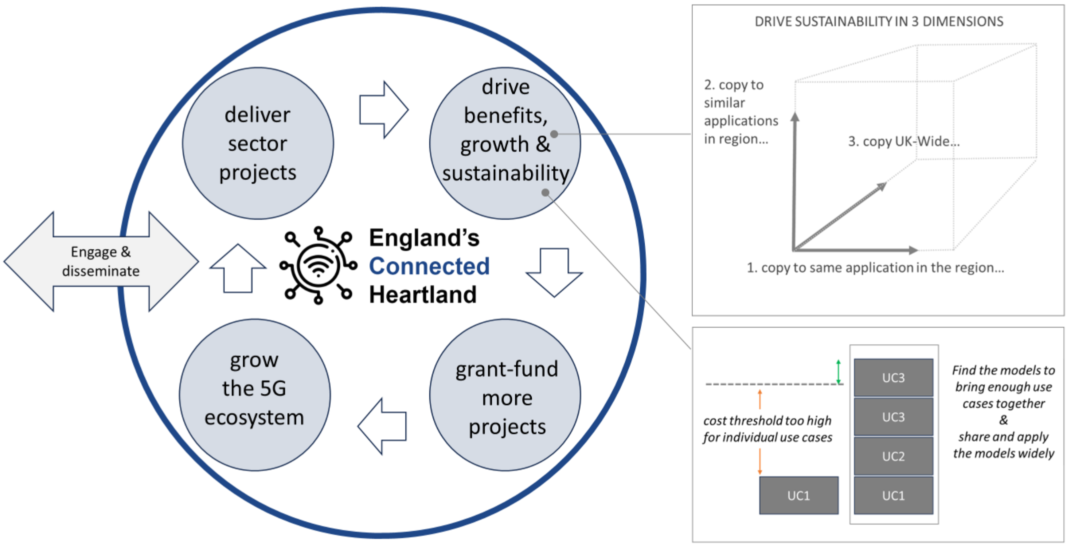
Fig 2: England’s Connected Heartland



13. **UK Wireless Infrastructure Strategy** published in 2023 sets out the case for driving private and public investment in wireless infrastructure. The report concludes that 5G”…will be the cornerstone of our digital economy…” where widespread adoption could see £159bn in productivity improvements by 2035. The report further sets out that the UK is falling behind in adoption of advanced wireless connectivity, particularly 5G Mobile Private Networks (MPN’s). MPN’s offer significant productivity gains in enterprise settings where automation can be enhanced by having literally thousands of small 5G transmitter/receivers attached to assembly line plant, tooling, laboratory equipment, sensors, and many other applications.

The DSIT 5G Innovation Regions (5GIR) is an intervention funded programme aimed at improving adoption in specific UK sector verticals. The ECH Advanced Manufacturing (Harwell) and Transport (East West Rail) projects are set to test and demonstrate commercial models that if successful can be widely replicated. This is represented in the diagram below.

Fig 3: Commercial Model Development



14. **Supplier Consultation**. Extensive informal consultation with suppliers took place prior to structured engagement in the form of supplier webinars, each attended by over 70 people representing over 30 suppliers. This was followed with publishing Prior Information Notices (PINs), one for each procurement.

> **5G Standalone (SA) Private Mobile Networks** differ from standard 5G networks provided by Mobile Network Operators in a number of important ways. These are closed networks with dedicated SIM cards to enable access. Because they are private, they offer service level agreements for important aspects needed in enterprise deployments, including availability, latency, & guaranteed bandwidth. 'Standalone' is a new capability in the UK. It means that not only the Radio Access Network (RAN) is dedicated, but the core backhaul fibre network is also not shared with any other services. Both networks are being procured as managed services with the suppliers responsible for service management, reporting, fault management etc.

15. **Stakeholder Engagement** has been widely undertaken over several months. This has been aimed at capturing requirements, testing demand & likely use cases, as well as establish preparedness for installation and integration with other ICT infrastructure and assets. This has included;

- Harwell:
  - Science & Technology Facilities Council (STFC), Advanced Research Clusters (ARC), Asset Management team, Estates, IT Management

group, Security management team, and individual entities such as European Space Agency (ESA), SA Catapult, Moderna and others.

- Rail Project:
    - o Network Rail, Network Rail Telecoms, East West Mainline Partnership, East West Rail Company, Chiltern Railways, England's Economic Heartland (EEH), Dept for Transport (DfT), National Farmers Union (NFU) and others.

16. **Functionality, Purpose, and Objectives of the projects**

a) Harwell Science & Innovation Campus: With over 200 innovative enterprises across four clusters (Space, Energy, Health, & Quantum) located at Harwell, this is an ideal location to demonstrate how a private 5G network can provide a range of benefits. The barrier our approach seeks to overcome is effectively 'who pays?' It is much more cost effective to deploy a single network that can be accessed by multiple entities than it would be for individual enterprises to stand up their own individual MPNs. Equally, those organisations such as STFC and ARC who do have broader responsibilities across the estate, despite having developed plans for a 5G MPN at Harwell, have not been able to pull together funding model business cases to invest in this capability. It should be noted that Harwell campus competes with similar science parks across the globe in locations such as Silicon Valley, Beijing, Singapore etc where this kind of connectivity is readily available. Currently there is no MNO 5G coverage at Harwell at all and even the 4G mobile coverage is patchy. The plan for Harwell should also make it more likely that a public 5G network would be built by one or more MNOs as our ECH project will make infrastructure assets available for use. After the first year of operation, ECH will work with stakeholders at Harwell to establish a process for billing and collecting revenue for users of the 5G MPN, most likely via existing ground rent/service charges issued to tenants.

b) Rail Project: The 5G rail project seeks to resolve an entirely new commercial model to enable the rail industry to find a way of providing decent connectivity for rail commuters. This is a long-standing problem in the UK and stems from the same 'who pays' conundrum as described in the Harwell project. The ECH project is using the concept of stacking use cases each with potential revenue opportunities which when combined aims to reduce or remove the need for public subsidy. These revenue streams can be described as:

(1) Train Operating Company (TOC) where the 5G MPN is made available via SIM card added to the train-top mobile antenna box which augments any MNO signal available on the route

(2) Network Rail where the connectivity can demonstrate the means of collecting the vast amount of data gathered onboard such as track condition sensors, trackside video of embankment conditions, onboard security, train safety, CCTV etc.

(3) Network Rail maintenance yards such as the vast new facility being built at the intersection of HS2 with EW Rail.
(4) Agri-tech connectivity for farms. There are over thirty farms along the short section of track in scope which is typical of much of the rail network across the UK. Agri-tech is a huge enabler of reducing costs for farms and improving productivity, but good connectivity is required and is often not available given MNOs focus on built up areas for infrastructure deployment
(5) Residential Fixed Wireless Access (FWAS) broadband service to trackside communities
(6) Business Park connectivity along the route which is also not uncommon given planning consent is easier for industrial units when near rail lines

To note, OCC, Cherwell DC, and Buckinghamshire Council have previously invested in significant spare trackside fibre and associated fibre breakout points (outside the rail fence) along this section of track. The purpose of that investment was to support this type of implementation at the point of the new section of track being built as it is $1/10^{th}$ of the cost of retrofitting and was seen as a strategic investment by the funding partners.

17. Following contract award for both projects, detailed design surveys and delivery planning identified a number of technical complexities and site constraints which were not apparent during the initial feasibility and procurement stages. Addressing these issues has required significant redesign work and generated additional delivery costs to ensure the necessary coverage requirements for both projects.

18. For the 5G Rail project, the original network design relied on the use of existing Network Rail GSM-R mast infrastructure. Subsequent technical assessment determined that this approach was not viable, requiring a complete redesign using new mast locations on privately owned land. This has resulted in additional requirements for land agreements, wayleaves, planning activity, power supplies, fibre connectivity, microwave backhaul and associated civil engineering works.

19. At Harwell Campus, the original design was based on deploying equipment on existing rooftop locations. Ongoing campus redevelopment and future building plans have subsequently rendered this approach unsuitable, both because of site availability constraints and because it would not deliver the required level of network coverage across the expanding campus.

The addition of new buildings across the campus significantly affects radio propagation and mobile network performance. These structures obstruct, absorb and reflect 5G signals, creating areas of reduced coverage and impacting network capacity and reliability. To maintain the required service levels, the network design has therefore been revised to utilise alternative infrastructure locations, including campus lighting columns, resulting in additional deployment costs.

20. DSIT has provided two additional grant payments totalling £540,000 to further support the project completions and the programme is seeking a further £900,000 investment from Digital Infrastructure Gainshare to fund the additional contract costs from the required design changes.

21. Approval of recommendations in this report would establish a total programme budget of £6.14 million, comprising £4.34 million DSIT grant and £1.80 million Gainshare. Forecast expenditure is £4.81 million capital and £1.33 million revenue.

22. Without the proposed budget increase, both projects would remain capable of delivering operational 5G networks. However, coverage would be materially reduced. At Harwell, this would limit availability to a smaller proportion of businesses and innovation facilities. Along East West Rail, coverage would extend across only part of the approximately 30-kilometre Bicester to Bletchley route. This would reduce the long-term strategic value of the projects and the investments made in them to date, constrain future commercial opportunities and diminish their ability to act as demonstrator schemes for future investment.

23. The ECH programme will be entirely funded via external (DSIT) grant funding £4.34 million (Received) and access to the digital infrastructure gainshare fund of £1.80 million (Held by OCC) to cover the increased contract costs and the minimum operational contract period 3 years post implementation. There are confirmed sufficient funds for the two capital programmes and all associated works (£5.18 million) and the operational delivery costs £0.96 million of uncommitted gainshare, as laid out in this report.

24. Note, the financial position set out in this report excludes future income generated by the two networks. Although both projects are expected to generate revenue through ongoing commercial use, a reliable forecast cannot be produced at this stage. Future income will be influenced by the final coverage achieved, the number and type of users served, and the value of services that the networks are able to support. As these factors will only become fully known once deployment is complete and the networks are operational, no income assumptions have been included in the financial appraisal. This reflects a pragmatic approach to assessing the programme's funding requirement. Future income generated by both projects is planned to be returned to the Gainshare Fund for supporting future projects.

Corporate Policies and Priorities

25. The England's Connected Heartland (ECH) programme supports Oxfordshire County Council's Corporate Plan priorities by using advanced digital infrastructure to enable innovation, economic growth, improved connectivity and more sustainable public services. The programme aligns with the Council's ambition to work with partners to deliver positive outcomes for residents, businesses and communities across Oxfordshire and the wider region.

26. The programme demonstrates the Council's commitment to being a Partner of Choice through Oxfordshire's leadership of a regional collaboration involving local authorities, public sector organisations, transport partners, research institutions and private sector suppliers. The programme has established shared governance arrangements, collaborative delivery mechanisms and knowledge-sharing activities that support innovation across a wider geographic area than Oxfordshire alone.

27. The projects contribute to the Council's ambition for a Greener Oxfordshire by supporting the development of digital infrastructure that can enable more efficient transport systems, remote monitoring, data-driven operations and reduced travel demand. The East West Rail private 5G network project is specifically intended to demonstrate how advanced connectivity can support rail operations, improve passenger experience and encourage greater use of public transport. The Harwell project supports the development and testing of digital technologies that have the potential to improve resource efficiency and support innovation in sectors including energy, science and advanced manufacturing.

28. The programme also supports a Fairer Oxfordshire by helping to improve access to advanced digital connectivity and by creating opportunities for economic growth, investment and employment. The Harwell network is intended to provide businesses and research organisations with access to infrastructure that would otherwise be difficult or prohibitively expensive to deploy individually. The rail project is designed to explore commercially sustainable approaches that could ultimately support improved connectivity for businesses, communities and passengers beyond the immediate project area.

29. The projects contribute to Thriving Communities by supporting the digital foundations required for modern public services, business growth and future innovation. The programme is testing approaches that, if successful, could be replicated elsewhere, helping to ensure that communities and organisations can benefit from improved digital connectivity and emerging technologies.

30. The programme also supports the Council's wider strategic objectives for innovation, economic development and place shaping. The Harwell Science and Innovation Campus project supports one of Oxfordshire's globally significant innovation locations, while the East West Rail project aligns with wider regional ambitions to improve connectivity across one of the UK's leading knowledge economy corridors. Together, the projects seek to demonstrate new commercial models for private 5G networks that could attract future investment and support long-term economic competitiveness.

31. Overall, the ECH programme supports Oxfordshire County Council's vision of working collaboratively to deliver sustainable economic growth, improved connectivity, innovation and better outcomes for residents, communities and businesses across Oxfordshire and the wider regions.

Financial Implications

32. The ECH programme will be entirely funded via external (DSIT) grant funding £4.34 million (Received) and access to the digital infrastructure gainshare fund of £1.80 million (Held by OCC) to cover the increased contract costs and the minimum operational contract period 3 years post implementation.

33. Confirmed there are sufficient funds for the two capital programmes and all associated works (£5.18 million) and the operational delivery costs £0.96 million. As such the projects bear no financial risk to OCC and the contracts were awarded using an open competitive tendering process and in line with value for money principles.

Comments checked by: **Kathy Wilcox, Head of Corporate Finance and Deputy Section 151 Officer.**

Legal Implications

34. The two 5G programmes that are referred to in this Cabinet paper were both subject to a compliant legal process under PCR2015 regulations, with both legal and Procurement members contributing to the construction and execution of the ITT and the associated Contract.

35. Adding value to the existing contracts will require compliance with governing legislation (PCR 2015 and the Subsidy Control Act 2022). Legal Services should be engaged to ensure that any contract variations comply with legislation.

Comments checked by: **Busola Akande, Solicitor (Contracts)**

Staff Implications

36. Each of the regional partners have committed to support the ECH programme for three years to the extent that is necessary. As the contract holder and lead local authority, Oxfordshire CC will need to resource the delivery, ongoing contract management, and commercialisation aspects for three years. This will likely be 2* FTE which will be resourced from the digital infrastructure programme team, which itself is entirely funded from the programme gainshare fund.

Equality & Inclusion Implications

37. No adverse impacts on any protected characteristic groups have been identified as a result of the recommendations contained within this report. The proposals relate primarily to the acceptance of additional external funding and approval of contract variations necessary to deliver the agreed project objectives.

38. The projects do not alter the Council's policies in relation to equality, diversity or inclusion and no disproportionate impacts on specific groups are anticipated.

Local Government Reorganisation Implications

39. Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) is not expected to materially affect delivery of the ECH programme or the achievement of its immediate outputs. However, Oxfordshire County Council is expected to cease operating from April 2028, with its functions transferring to three new unitary authorities. While Local Government Reorganisation will change the governance landscape within Oxfordshire from April 2028, it is not expected to diminish the value of the outcomes delivered through the ECH programme. The programme has established digital infrastructure, partnerships, technical knowledge and evidence that will remain available to successor authorities and can continue to support future priorities around integrated transport, sustainable economic growth, innovation and improved public services. The main potential risk is to the long-term governance, ownership and exploitation of programme benefits beyond the lifetime of the project. To mitigate this risk, programme outputs, evidence, partnerships, lessons learned and any enduring assets will be documented and made available to successor authorities as part of normal transition planning. The ECH programme supports strategic objectives relating to transport connectivity, innovation, economic growth and improved public services, and these outcomes are expected to remain relevant under future local government arrangements. Accordingly, Local Government Reorganisation is considered a manageable transition risk rather than a significant threat to the sustainability of programme benefits.

Sustainability Implications

40. Digital infrastructure invariably enables communication that reduces the need for travel which both improves productivity as well as reducing carbon emissions. The Harwell project will provide both aspects where greater collaboration is possible between Harwell enterprises and their supply chain and partner institutions, both within the UK and internationally. The rail project seeks to find a sustainable funding mechanism that will enable reliable rail passenger connectivity. This will in turn attract more people to using sustainable rail transport rather than vehicle commuting. Whilst the ECH rail project is very small in scale, if successful it could have an application much more widely across the UK's rail network.

Risk Management

41. The ECH programme is managed in accordance with the Council's project governance and risk management arrangements. A detailed programme risk register is maintained and reviewed regularly by the programme team and governance boards. The recommendations in this report are intended to

mitigate delivery risks that emerged following detailed site surveys, technical design development and delivery planning activities.

42. Approval of the recommendations will reduce delivery risk by enabling both projects to be implemented substantially in line with their intended objectives and coverage requirements. Without the proposed funding, the projects would need to be delivered on a reduced basis, which would *materially reduce the coverage, functionality and benefits realisation.* This would significantly diminish their value as demonstrator programmes for future private 5G deployment.

Consultations

43. Whilst there is no statutory consultation requirement associated with the recommendations contained within this report, extensive stakeholder engagement has been undertaken throughout the development and delivery of the ECH programme and the associated procurement activities.

44. The programme has been developed collaboratively through the England's Connected Heartland regional partnership and has involved ongoing engagement with participating local authorities, government departments, infrastructure providers, supplier organisations and intended project beneficiaries.

45. Stakeholder feedback and technical input have directly informed the development of the revised network designs and delivery approaches that underpin the recommendations within this report. The proposed contract changes and associated funding requirements reflect the outcomes of this collaborative engagement process and the technical evidence gathered during project delivery.

Robin Rogers
Director of Economy and Place

Contact Officer: Craig Bower, Digital Connectivity Programme Director

September 2026