INDEPENDENT SURVEY

FarrPoint Digital Connectivity Survey 2023

January 2023

Contents

Summary

The COVID pandemic demonstrated a new way of working which is likely to stay with increased home working holding the key to a more agile future. The role of connectivity in underpinning business and social activities is undisputed, and so increased investment has been targeted at getting faster, more advanced connectivity solutions out across the country to keep up with demand.

The technology sector has always moved at a phenomenal pace and the connectivity element has not disappointed. With a drive to full fibre connectivity and 5G, together with the introduction of smart places to try and reap the benefits of an increasing amount of available data, we thought this a good time to launch our first Connectivity Survey to capture views on these developments across local authorities.

Local Authorities have a key role to play in ensuring the right digital connectivity is available to support business activity, social interaction and delivery of public services.

The survey shows that around 50% of local authorities who responded have invested time and resource in developing their own **digital connectivity strategy**. Some of the others have connectivity included as part of a wider digital strategy, whilst others struggle to secure the attention this deserves within their organisation. We would suggest that the key importance of connectivity and its far-reaching role across the organisation and the wider region means a separate focused strategy with actions and timescales is essential.

Increasing **gigabit connectivity** is where most progress was seen by our survey respondents in 2022 and will likely continue through 2023. It is closely followed by a recognition that good connectivity

is required for everyone, which will be even more important to ensure an ever-increasing digital gap is avoided. There is a mix of capability and involvement amongst local authorities in relation to the role they play in helping to improve connectivity; some are very proactive with multiple initiatives, whilst others have little resource and are more reliant on the market and national government to deliver.

There remain a range of **barriers to improving connectivity**, largely due to funding and local deployment issues, and it is disappointing to see unnecessary barriers still evident in some of the operational processes between public bodies in telecom operators. This is an area of increasing focus in industry, and we hope to see further improvement in 2023 to eliminate or at least reduce these obstructions. Benefit from connectivity is only achieved if services are taken up and affordability is seen as the primary barrier to this. Although we do think that service take up could be related to the lack of education and awareness of options available, including some of the lower tariffs now being offered by operators.

Interestingly, **5G** has a relatively low profile in the survey, with, perhaps, much of the early hype having waned. Although there are pockets of very interesting and informative 5G projects underway, it appears to be largely seen as a good consumer evolution but with an awareness that it could bring specific benefits to specific sectors as the technology and marketplace matures.

Smart places is, perhaps, the area which is the most surprising in the responses albeit confirming some of our suspicions. There appears a general feeling that there is no business case for these smart projects, and it is difficult to secure interest and commitment within local authorities to invest at the moment. We

think this could change as the propositions become clearer and are better articulated.

Amongst the many changes taking place in the industry, **the switch-offs** of some of the infrastructure and services that have been relied on for many years are significant, imminent and not well enough known. This is reflected in the responses to our questions on the analogue, copper and mobile switch-offs that are underway or planned, where for even the most imminent analogue switch-off, 25% of respondents had not yet made plans. This is such an important set of events that requires resource to plan and transition, which will only be helped by much better awareness at senior and wider levels.

Finally, the role of connectivity in the drive to **reducing carbon emissions** and meeting our climate targets is not sufficiently prioritised as evidenced by the survey responses. Whilst most respondents understood connectivity can play a role, 80% had not worked this through to a full understanding of how connectivity can contribute. This is an area we expect to increase significantly through 2023 as public opinion and media coverage force organisations to think again about what they can do to reduce their environmental impact, and the capability of connectivity to affect the move to Net Zero becomes better understood.

Foreword

Ceren Clulow

DIRECTOR OF CONNECTING CAMBRIDGESHIRE

Digital connectivity is increasingly important to underpin social and economic activity across the country and local authorities can play an important role in its promotion, facilitation and investment. Although I see many surveys in my inbox, this is the first study into connectivity barriers and priorities within local authority areas in the UK.

My role as Director of Connecting Cambridgeshire is to build on the success of collaborative working with local councils, government bodies and external organisations, to ensure that Cambridgeshire and Peterborough have the leading-edge digital connectivity infrastructure needed to support economic growth, allow businesses and communities to thrive, and make it easier for people to access public services.

The Cambridgeshire and Peterborough area is hugely diverse with a rich mix of cities, market towns and rural areas, which presents both challenges and opportunities in achieving the leading edge digital infrastructure needed for businesses and communities to thrive. We believe it essential that we have a unified digital infrastructure strategy addressing this mix that is tailored to needs and priorities at a local level.

Our current strategy incorporates multiple workstreams, targeting the different aspects of digital connectivity from broadband, mobile, 'Smart' technology and public access Wi-Fi to ensure that our area has the leading digital connectivity infrastructure required to ensure that:

- All businesses have access to the leading-edge digital connectivity needed to help them succeed and to deliver sustainable growth

- Communities, particularly in rural areas, are digitally connected and able to access education, jobs, health, social care and other public services.

- Digital connectivity supports home working and remote training alongside other agile working practises, which can contribute to reduced commuting, less traffic congestion and more flexible and more inclusive job opportunities.

- 'Smart' technology, including 'Internet of Things' based connectivity helps to provide ready access to real-time transport information and environmental monitoring, leading to increased use of sustainable transport solutions, reducing private car usage and contributing to a reduction in carbon emissions and meeting climate change targets.

- Businesses, communities and public services in our area are able to harness digital connectivity and advanced technology to support sustainable growth, good quality of life and a strong local economy with no communities left behind.

I really welcome this report by FarrPoint which shares views and priorities across local authorities and raises the importance of connectivity and the role that local authorities can play. As someone who works in a local authority, and closely collaborates with other councils, operators, and other telecoms industry bodies, I find it very useful to understand what my peers find challenging and what their priorities are so that we can share experiences, learn from best practice and work towards our common goals.

Introduction

Dr. Andrew Muir
FARRPOINT CEO

As the UK continues to invest in full fibre and improved mobile connectivity, at FarrPoint we were keen to launch our independent Connectivity Survey to review and compare the priorities and barriers that digital leaders face within local authority areas across the UK.

We reached out to over 100 digital leaders at local authorities across England, Scotland and Wales from both rural and dense urban areas. We wanted to capture their priorities and views on a range of connectivity topics, from Gigabit to supporting our collective drive to net zero.

Responses were collected throughout December 2022 via an online survey and follow up video interviews. We would like to take this opportunity to thank all respondents who took part and also to Ceren Clulow for the introductory remarks.

This report contains analysis of the responses, some particular quotes we felt worth highlighting, and some useful additional information from our own work on certain topics.

We intend to make this an annual survey, so we welcome your feedback on any particular points and what you might find useful in future reports. Please email me directly at andrew.muir@farrpoint.com.

We hope you find the report interesting.

Strategy and Planning

Strategy and Planning

Digital connectivity is a key pillar to support regional development priorities with clear economic growth potential, and the need for fast, reliable connectivity has become even more apparent in recent times. A digital connectivity strategy considers how connectivity, in all its forms, can be used to support priority sectors and industries in the area with a set of actions, deliverables and timescales to maximise benefit. We wanted to understand local authorities' approach to developing an up-to-date digital connectivity strategy.

Q.1 WE ASKED IF LOCAL AUTHORITIES HAD **DEVELOPED A DIGITAL CONNECTIVITY STRATEGY** AND IF SO, **HOW OLD** THAT STRATEGY WAS.

43%	**19%**	**26%**	**12%**
Yes, our strategy is less than 3 years old	Yes, our strategy is older than 3	We are currently developing our strategy	No, we don't have a strategy

43% of respondents had a strategy which was under 3 years old, suggesting the importance of connectivity to the organisation. And although 26% were currently developing their strategy, this does also suggest they now see the importance and are taking action.

Almost 20% of local authorities who responded have a strategy in place which is more than 3 years old, meaning it is likely that delivery is well

underway. However there is a risk that the significant events over the last few years may mean the initial strategy needs to be refreshed to reflect any changes to the local economy, its businesses, and residents.

We would of course encourage the 12% who haven't developed a strategy to think about the benefits that can be achieved from a focused look at how connectivity in all its forms could support their area. We understand there can be difficulties gaining cross-departmental support to contribute to a cohesive strategy, and that in some cases, connectivity is combined within wider digital or regional strategies. We also note that this figure could be understated as those who don't see digital connectivity as a priority are also likely to be without a strategy and may not have responded to the survey.

> *"Our Council is quite immature in terms of Digital as a result of the historic outsourcing of services – the contract has constrained our ability to innovate as it was designed to reduce costs and is limited to maintaining current systems (keeping the lights on) with no facility to change without incurring significant additional costs."*

> *"Our digital infrastructure strategy was signed off in 2020 and runs to 2025 – it's updated annually to reflect any changes in the market / technologies / policy. It's vital to have a team in place to achieve connectivity goals, with good GIS resources in place to be able to understand coverage plans and make decisions."*

Before looking at the priorities planned for 2023, we wanted to review where the most progress was seen in 2022.

With the focus from national government and industry on rolling out gigabit services and investments in fibre, it is not surprising that this was the area with most progress seen in 2022. There have also been improvements in 4G coverage and to a lesser extent 5G, which was largely similar to progress with smart places and IoT.

The least progress was seen with respect to ensuring digital connectivity is aligned with net-zero targets, suggesting this is an area that is yet to be fully understood, despite the overwhelming majority of local authorities having declared climate emergencies in their area.

Q2. WE ASKED WHERE THE MOST PROGRESS WAS SEEN IN 2022 AND HOW THE FOLLOWING WERE RANKED
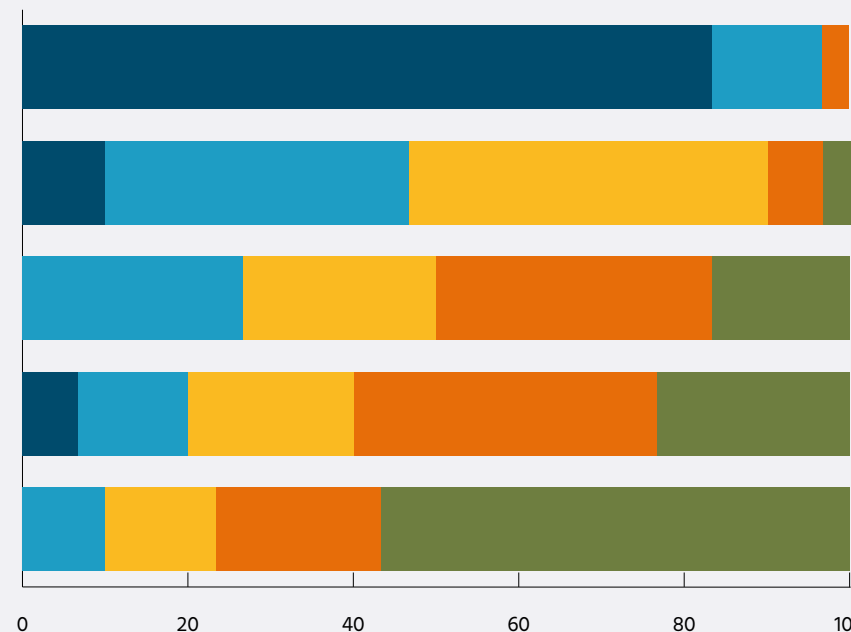

First choice ▮▮▮▮▮ Last choice

- More areas covered by gigabit broadband
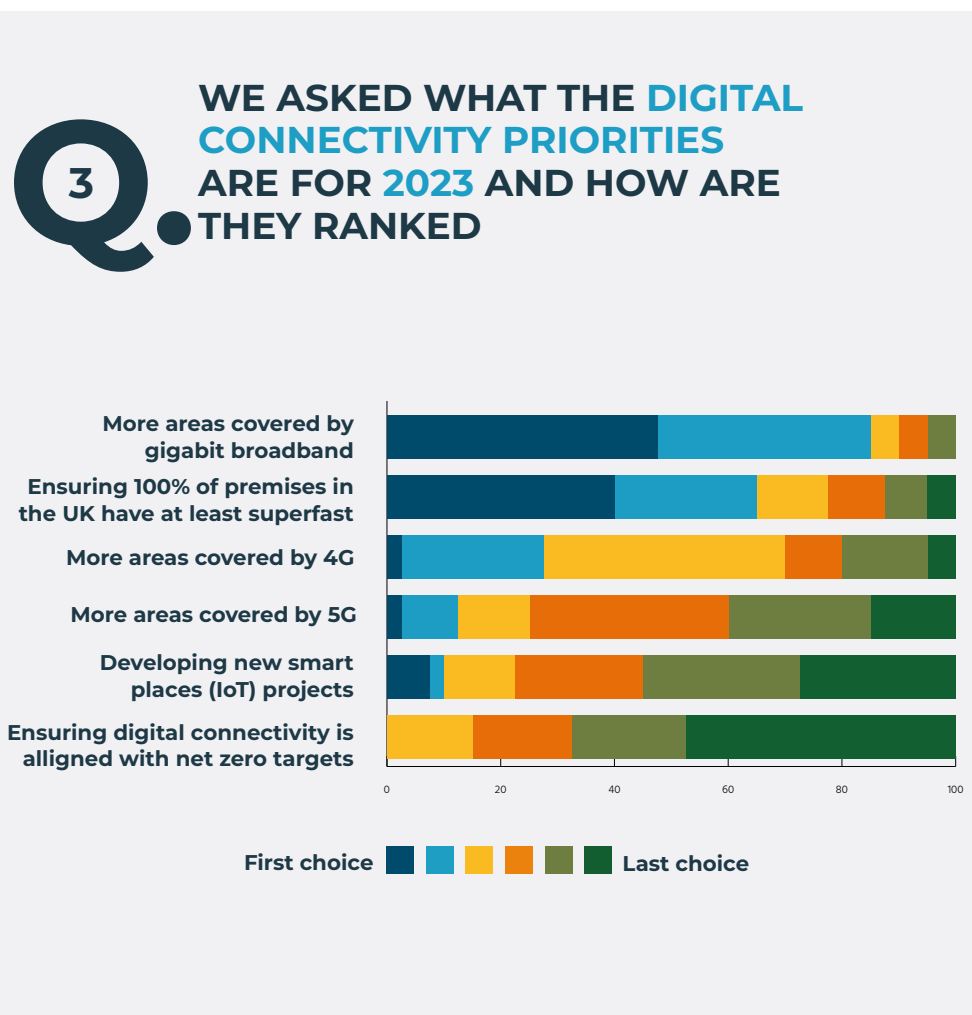- More areas covered by 4G
- More areas covered by 5G
- More smart places / IoT innovation
- Ensuring digital connectivity is aligned with net-zero targets

0   20   40   60   80   100

Thinking forward to 2023, we wanted to know what the local authority priorities were across fixed, mobile and smart technologies:

WE ASKED WHAT THE DIGITAL CONNECTIVITY PRIORITIES ARE FOR 2023 AND HOW ARE THEY RANKED

Q.3

More areas covered by gigabit broadband

Ensuring 100% of premises in the UK have at least superfast

More areas covered by 4G

More areas covered by 5G

Developing new smart places (IoT) projects

Ensuring digital connectivity is alligned with net zero targets

First choice ▪▪▪▪▪ Last choice

The results show a continuing focus on gigabit coverage, closely followed by the desire to get everyone connected to at least superfast levels so as not to leave anyone unable to access digital connectivity - which is key to maximising the benefit of online services and applications.

Interestingly, the lower role of 5G when compared to the desire to have more areas covered by 4G is perhaps indicative of this being seen as an evolutionary upgrade rather than the hype of revolutionary change initially heralded.

Smart places initiatives are perhaps still challenged by lack of solid business cases for deployment beyond small-scale pilots. We are not surprised that digital connectivity aligned to net-zero targets ranks last - as much of the focus thus far appears to be on the more established route of making improvements to buildings to make them more energy efficient. We would expect, and hope, that this will rise in significance as net-zero targets get nearer and the role of connectivity is realised as being an essential enabler to achieving these targets.

To further understand the role that connectivity has within the organisation as an enabler of wider economic benefits, we asked a number of questions around the role the organisation plays alongside the supplier market and national interventions:

Q.4 **WE ASKED ABOUT HOW DIGITAL CONNECTIVITY IS VIEWED WITHIN THE ORGANISATION, IS IT SEEN AS A KEY ENABLER AND A PRIMARY OBJECTIVE - TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOU AGREE OR DISAGREE WITH THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS?**

Legend: Strongly disagree, Disagree, Agree, Strongly agree

- Digital infrastructure plays a fundamental role in enabling the region to remain competitive
- My organisation needs to do more to understand the current connectivity levels within our region
- My organisation treats improving digital infrastructure as a primary objective within our current regional strategy
- My organisation will rely on the market to delivery digital infrastructure and does not plan to directly intervene
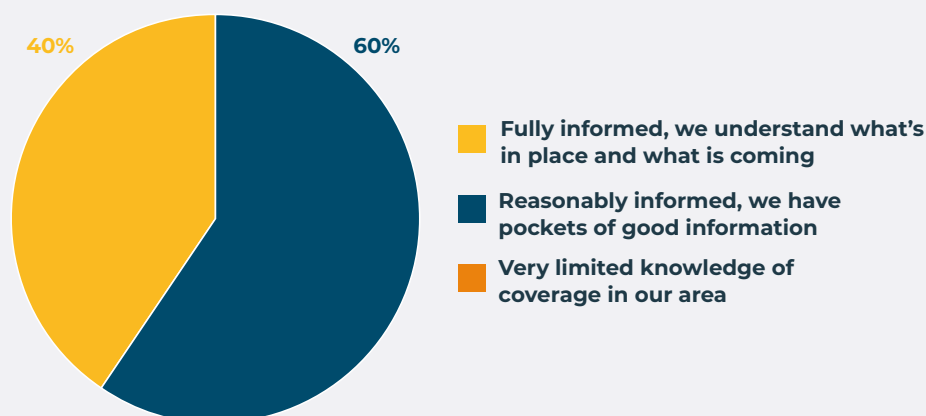- My organisation does not see digital infrastructure deployment as a priority for the region
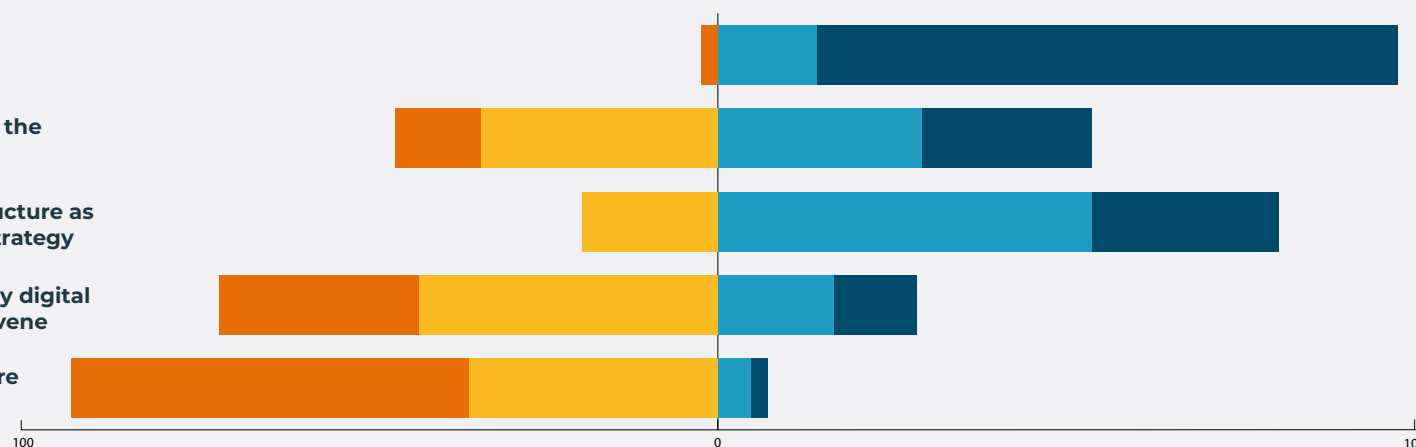
The vast majority of respondents thought their organisation recognised the priority of digital connectivity and that it did play a fundamental role in the area's competitiveness. There was an even split around how well they understood the current connectivity in their area, and a large majority who thought that their organisation would not just rely on the market to deliver but would be intervening to some extent to help improve infrastructure in their region. This suggests that despite the significant investments being made by both the market and central government, respondents are not confident that connectivity will be delivered in their area without local involvement.

Q. 5 HOW GOOD IS YOUR ORGANISATION'S KNOWLEDGE OF DIGITAL CONNECTIVITY COVERAGE IN YOUR AREA?

40% **60%**

- Fully informed, we understand what's in place and what is coming
- Reasonably informed, we have pockets of good information
- Very limited knowledge of coverage in our area

The results show that all respondents are at least reasonably well informed about coverage, but most respondents agreed that there were pockets of good information with some lacking. We suspect this could largely refer to mobile coverage, including the extent of 5G, and also potentially around the real-world performance figures of fixed broadband and the future delivery of intervention projects in the area.

Positively, none of the respondents stated that they had very little knowledge of coverage levels in their area, however this could indicate that those who have limited knowledge may not have responded to the survey.
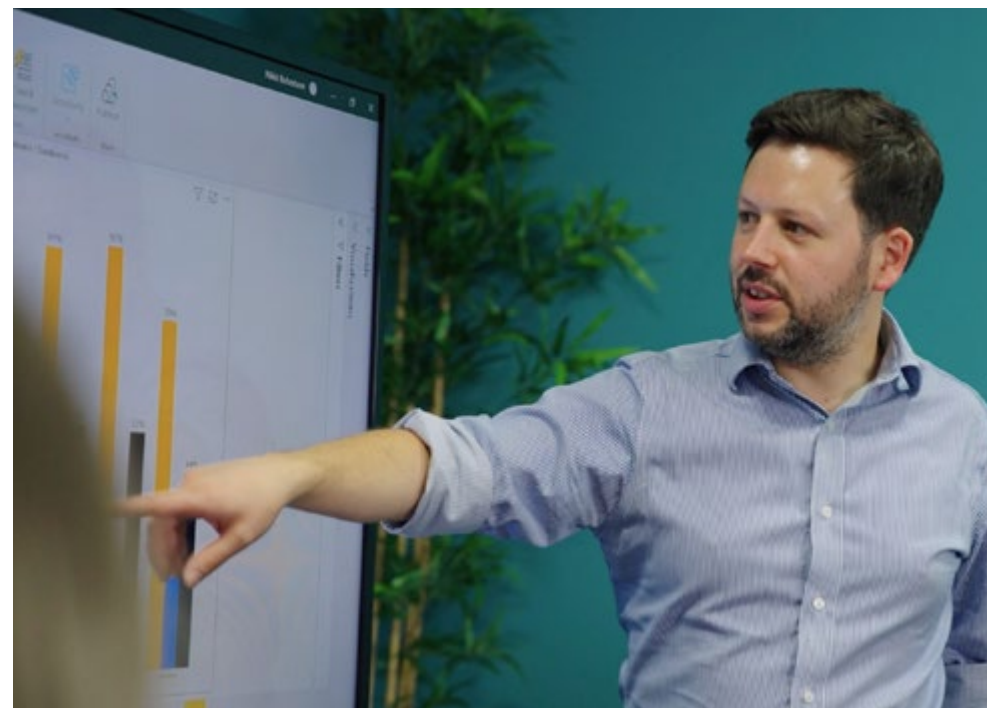
"We find that the coverage information available is good in terms of providing high level figures, but the Ofcom data has a significant time-lag and also doesn't allow us to identify small pockets of poor connectivity which will also need to be addressed"
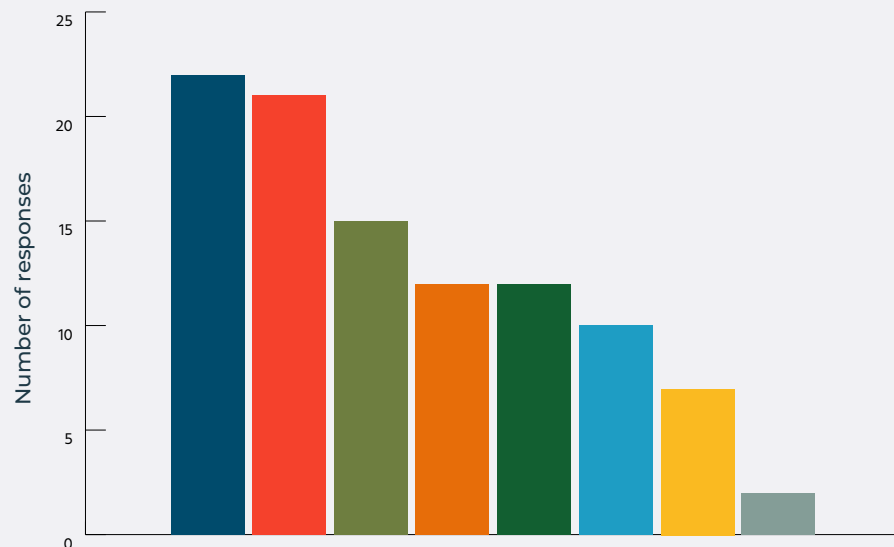
Barriers

Barriers

Q.6 WE ASKED WHAT THE **MAIN BARRIERS WERE TO IMPROVING CONNECTIVITY** IN THE LOCAL AUTHORITY AREA

Number of responses (y-axis, 0 to 25)

Legend:
- Lack of funding from central government
- Local infrastructure deployment challenges
- Lack of operator interest in my area
- Lack of collaboration between local authorities and operators
- Lack of human resources / talent
- Lack of accurate data on coverage in the area
- Low priority in the wider strategy at my local authority
- Low demand for improved services

Barriers to improved digital connectivity come from a range of sources not all within the control of the public sector such as supplier funding, resources and supply chain issues. However, of those within some influence of local authorities and other public bodies, we wanted to understand the barriers that local authorities saw in their own particular area.

It is clearly not a lack of demand for better services but instead a lack of central government funding which is perceived as the biggest barrier to improving connectivity. It is closely followed by the challenges of infrastructure deployment which is regularly raised by the industry as one of their main challenges. Arranging street works, seeking permits, going through planning all contribute to time and cost of deployment; if these elements can be speeded up or at least well understood and managed by the local authority, then it becomes more attractive to operators to build in an area.

A perceived lack of market interest in deployment within respondents' areas was the third highest response, suggesting a disconnect between national connectivity targets and the information provided to local authorities. This could be as a result of operator reluctance to share details of their deployment plans due to high levels of competition within the market, combined with a move away from local authorities undertaking their own open market reviews to a model where this is now undertaken centrally at a national level.

> *"Investment is a major barrier to deployment of connectivity – it's not the lack of funding, it's more how the funding is being targeted and allocated by the national programmes."*
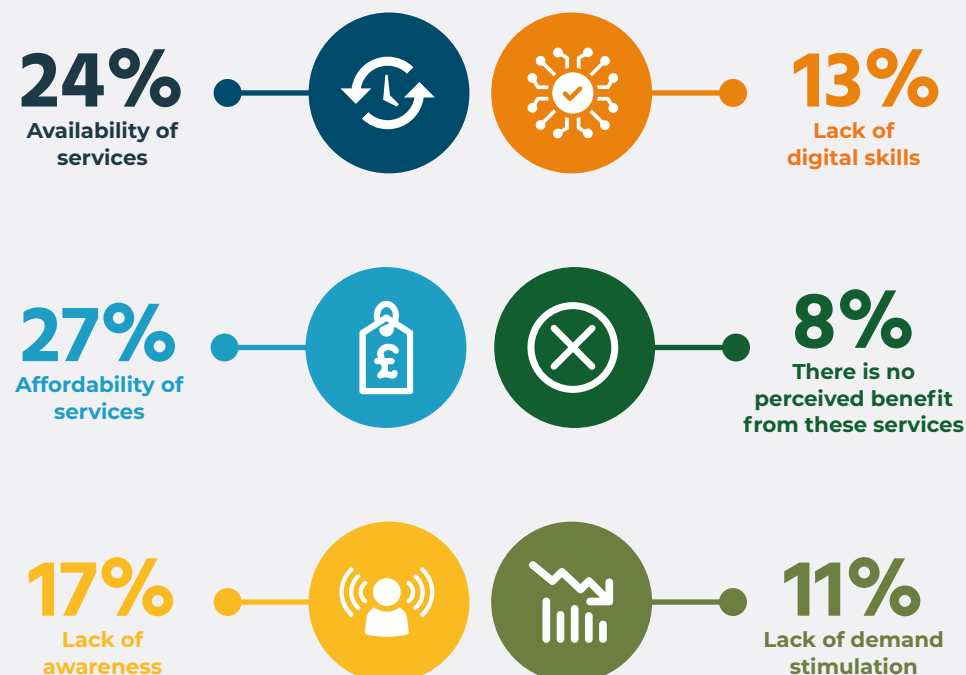
> *"Residents are frustrated by multiple street works as a result of overbuild – they just don't understand why it can't be better coordinated or follow a dig-once approach."*
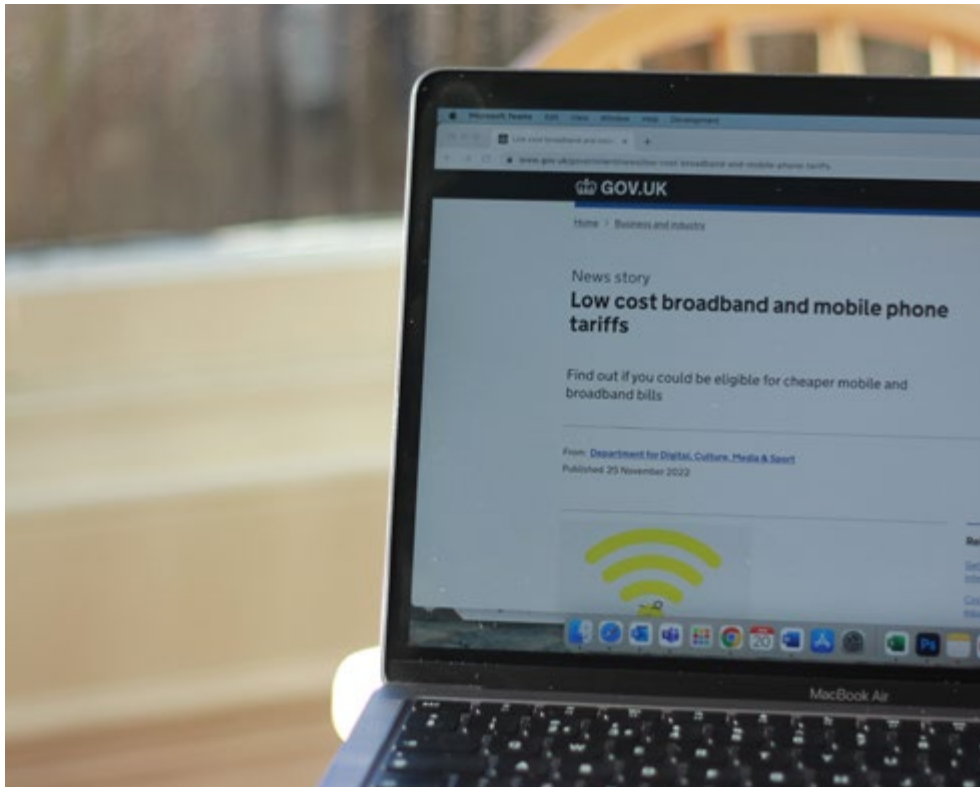
The benefits of digital connectivity are not delivered purely by increasing the availability of services; subscribers and businesses have to take up these services. This is becoming an area of increasing focus to the supplier market as infrastructure build is delivered and payback on this investment is now expected.

> *"The Council continues to make it difficult for operators to deploy, for example it will reject all 5G mast applications as it's better politically to be seen to reject them as the Council and allow them to be overruled by planning appeal. We're starting to make progress, but a gulf remains between ambition and the operational teams."*

> *"It's our challenging geography which is the biggest barrier to deployment rather than funding, demand or anything else."*

Q.7 WE ASKED WHAT THE BARRIERS TO TAKE-UP ARE IN THE AREA

24%
Availability of services

13%
Lack of digital skills

27%
Affordability of services

8%
There is no perceived benefit from these services

17%
Lack of awareness

11%
Lack of demand stimulation

Interestingly, affordability of services is seen as the primary barrier closely followed by availability. Clearly this will differ depending on location with more rural areas, perhaps, likely to score a lack of availability higher. Affordability is a concern particularly as the cost-of-living pressures become greater, although we would suggest that the cost of connectivity access is far outweighed by the benefits that can be achieved through access to cheaper and more competitive products and services.

Lack of awareness was the next highest, suggesting there is an ongoing need to ensure that as new or upgraded connectivity is rolled out, people are made aware of its availability and understand how they can switch to a new service should they wish. Historically, this has been achieved via a combination of supplier marketing in addition to demand stimulation activities undertaken by digital teams within local authorities, resulting in high levels of take-up of superfast broadband. It is not yet clear how this will be replicated with publicly subsidised gigabit rollout due to the change to a central delivery model, which has removed much of the incentive for local authorities to commit resources to this activity.

> *"The issue with future take-up of fibre is that people don't see a significant benefit over current superfast connectivity, full fibre is not perceived to be any better despite it not necessarily being more expensive."*

A new study from FarrPoint predicts that digital connectivity costs could rise by nearly 8% in 2023. But even so, consumers are urged to not cancel their contracts as being connected will save them money in the long run. Click here to read more.

The Importance of Gigabit

The Importance of Gigabit

The focus from national government and industry is on rolling out gigabit services with significant investments in fibre.

Full-fibre broadband is available to 12.4m homes (42%): this is 4.3 million more premises (14 percentage points higher) than a year ago, and for the second year running represents the highest year-on-year increase since full fibre started being rolled out in the UK.

Gigabit-capable broadband is available to 20.8m homes (70%): this includes full fibre and upgraded cable networks that are capable of delivering download speeds of 1 Gbit/s or higher.

{Ofcom Connected Nations 2022)

The importance of the drive for gigabit is that whilst users may not currently have a need for these speeds, tthe underlying infrastructure required to deliver them will offer a level of future proofing to meet future demand. With this policy in place, we wanted to understand how local authorities viewed this approach for their area and the role they expected to play.
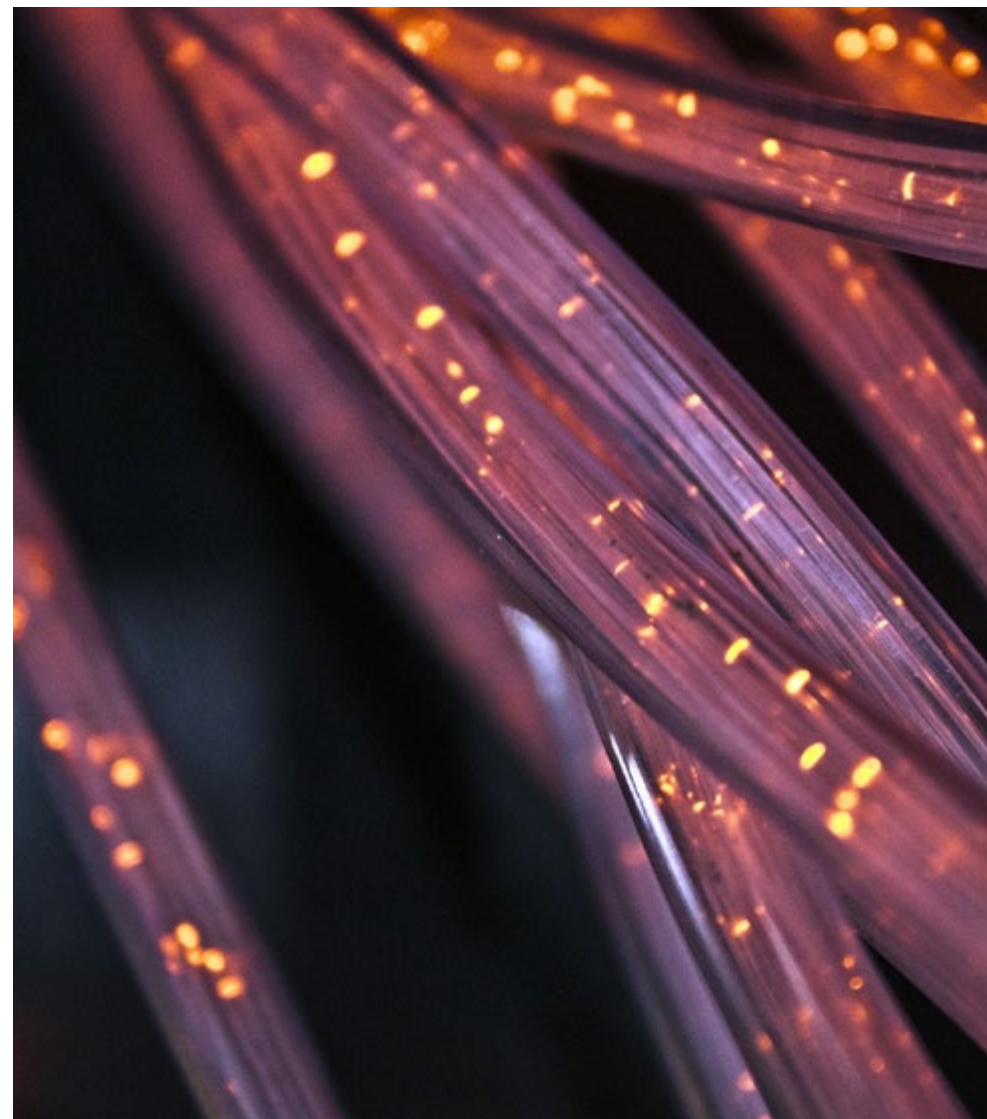
Q. 8 WITH REGARDS TO GIGABIT, TO WHAT EXTENT TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOU AGREE OR DISAGREE WITH THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS?

Legend: Strongly disagree · Disagree · Agree · Strongly agree

Gigabit plays a fundamental role in enabling the region to remain competitive

There is demonstrable demand for gigabit speeds within the region

My organisation needs to do more to understand the benefits of gigabit connectivity

My organisation treats increasing coverage of gigabit connectivity as a primary objective within our current regional strategy

My organisation will rely on the market to delivery gigabit services and will not directly intervene

100 — 0 — 100
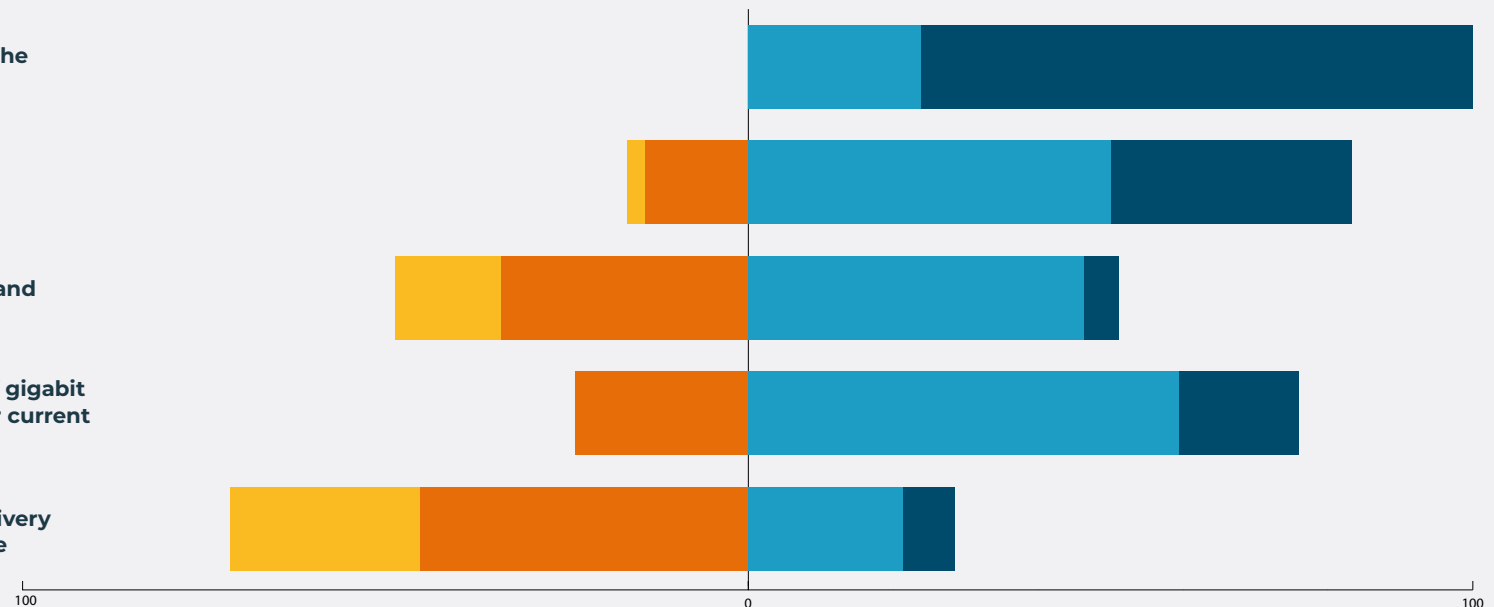
All respondents agreed that gigabit plays a fundamental role in enabling their region to remain competitive and 85% agreed there was a demonstrable need for gigabit speeds. Although not broken down, we believe this will be more about future demand than current, given the average take up of gigabit where available is still relatively low at approx. 25% across the UK (Ofcom Connected Nations 2022).

There was an even split of organisations which felt they needed to do more to understand the benefits of gigabit over and above the general view that it is important from a competitive position. As with connectivity in general, a significant majority thought that their organisation would not just rely on the market to deliver but would be intervening to some extent to help improve gigabit in their region.

Whilst the national gigabit intervention is being run centrally by the Department of Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS), and there is a limited role for local bodies, there are still local measures which local authorities can progress in parallel. We wanted to understand what had been done to date and what the plans were for 2023.

Nearly all respondents felt their organisation had a role to play in ensuring gigabit was delivered in their area, but only 45% of those felt that they were sufficiently resourced to meet this need. This is perhaps a reflection on the change within the organisation's resources since the superfast programmes have been completed, which required local resources to run and manage the projects. This presents a dilemma for local authorities who are no longer receiving funding for broadband delivery and have significant cost pressures making it difficult to justify internal funding for resources, despite considering digital connectivity as fundamental to their area remaining competitive.

Q.9 WE ASKED WHAT THE ROLE OF THEIR ORGANISATION SHOULD BE AND IF THEY ARE SUFFICIENTLY RESOURCED TO MEET THIS ROLE

45%
Our organisation should play an active role in ensuring gigabit connectivity is delivered and we are resourced to achieve this

50%
Our organisation should play an active role in ensuring gigabit connectivity is delivered but we are not resourced to achieve this
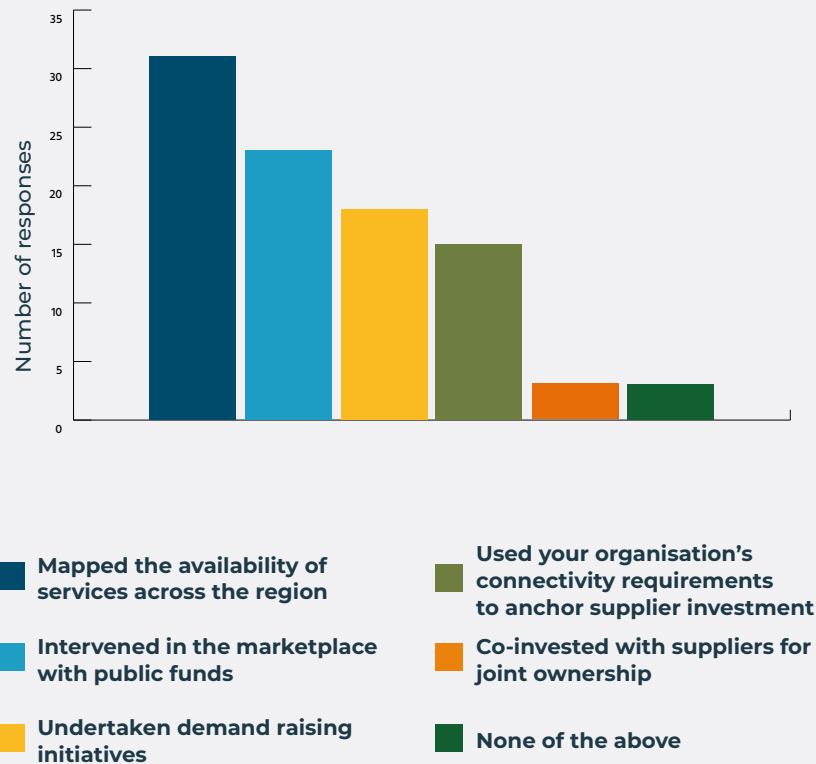
5%
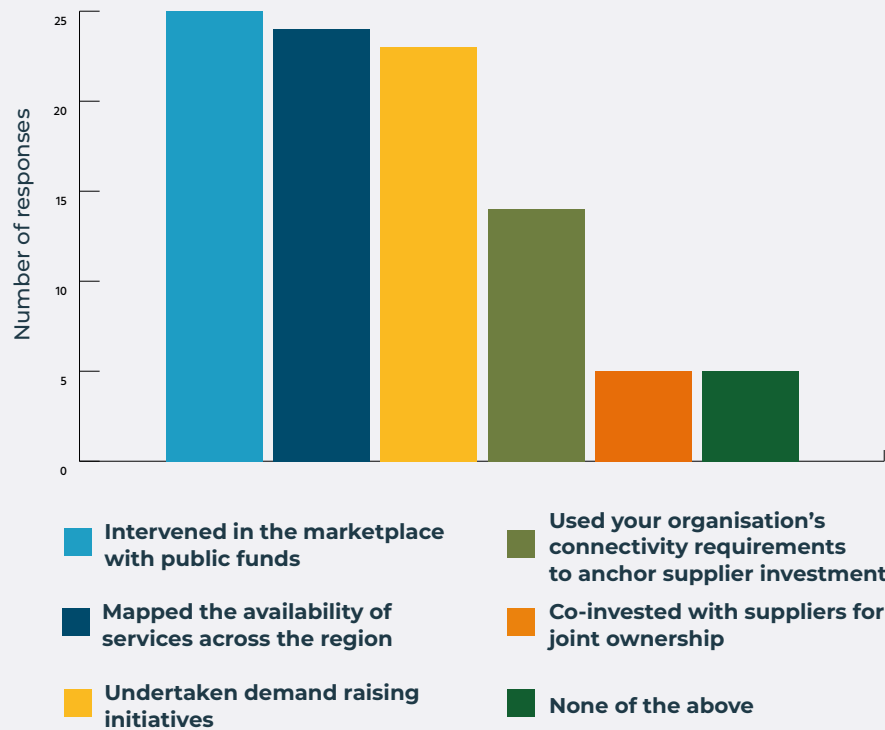Our organisation does not expect to play a role in ensuring gigabit connectivity is delivered

Q.10 IN RELATION TO IMPROVING GIGABIT CONNECTIVITY, IN WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING AREAS HAS YOUR ORGANISATION ALREADY TAKEN THE MOST ACTION

Number of responses

- Mapped the availability of services across the region
- Intervened in the marketplace with public funds
- Undertaken demand raising initiatives
- Used your organisation's connectivity requirements to anchor supplier investment
- Co-invested with suppliers for joint ownership
- None of the above

Around 75% of organisations had undertaken some form of mapping of services across the region and around 50% had been involved with some form of intervention with public funds and/or undertaken some demand raising initiatives. Around 30% of organisations had been involved in an anchor tenancy type model to help drive fibre connectivity in their region but there was little evidence of co-investment with suppliers in any form of joint venture arrangement. It is clear from the responses that a number of local authorities continue to play an active role in ensuring digital connectivity improvements within their area are delivered and are keeping a close eye on progress.

Q.11 IN RELATION TO **IMPROVING GIGABIT CONNECTIVITY**, IN WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING AREAS DOES YOUR **ORGANISATION PLAN TO TAKE THE MOST ACTION** IN THE NEXT THREE YEARS?

Legend:
- Intervened in the marketplace with public funds
- Mapped the availability of services across the region
- Undertaken demand raising initiatives
- Used your organisation's connectivity requirements to anchor supplier investment
- Co-invested with suppliers for joint ownership
- None of the above

As before, there are plans for more mapping to be undertaken along with further interventions and demand raising initiatives. The anchor tenancy model is still of some interest although the co-investment model is still not being pursued to any extent.

> *"There should be more willingness to enable local bodies to map gigabit on public facing websites albeit with anonymised supplier data"*
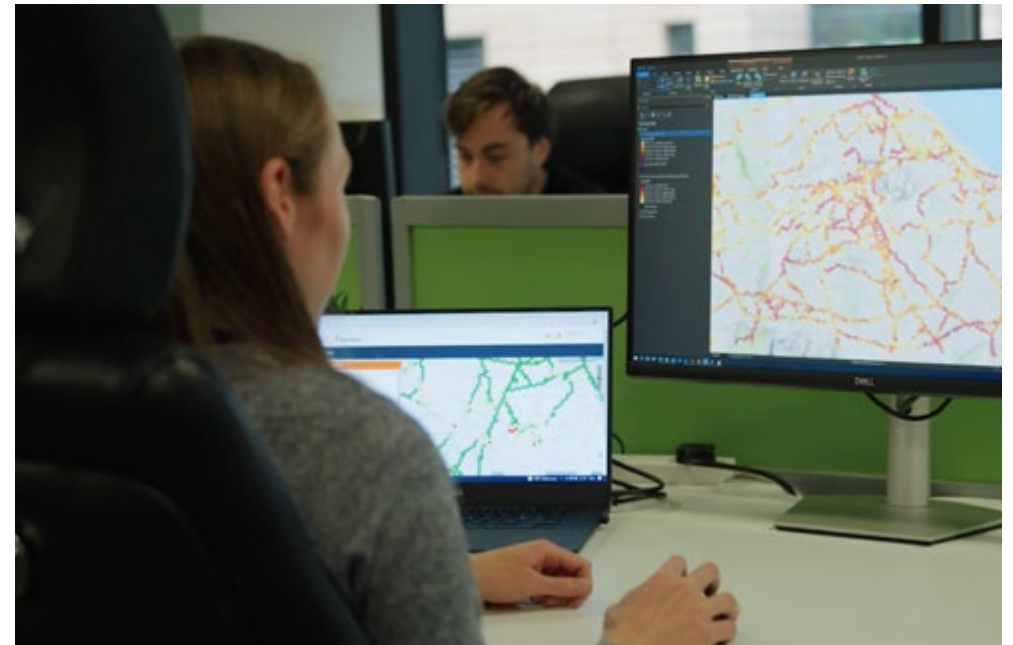
The Role of 5G

The Role of 5G

5G has the potential to support many different sectors as an overall underpinning connectivity solution, from remote agriculture and rural connectivity through to industrial manufacturing, transport and healthcare. The 5G market is still in its infancy as early use cases are investigated and the technical updates are delivered to allow the full capability of 5G to be made available. There has been a period of early hype followed by a period of understanding that the initial deployments only provide marginally better mobile broadband until further releases are made available and the market develops to offer more innovative solutions.

We wanted to understand the view from local authorities and where they could see the most benefit of 5G in their area.

12. WE ASKED TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOU AGREE OR DISAGREE WITH THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS?

Strongly disagree ■ **Disagree** ■ **Agree** ■ **Strongly agree**

5G is a high priority for my organisation and will play an important role in the delivery of our services to the public

My organisation sees 5G as a priority for businesses and economic development of our area

We need to ensure our area is fully covered by 4G first before investing more in 5G

5G is currently not a priority for my organisation

100   0   100

In general there was a fairly even split of views in relation to 5G. Slightly more than 50% of organisations believed 5G has a high priority in the delivery of services although most thought it was not a priority for the organisation. Around 60% thought that 5G was a priority for business and economic development although around 60% also thought that the priority should be to get 4G coverage improved first. This is more likely to be a priority for more rural areas where 4G coverage remains lower than urban areas.

This echoes respondents' priorities for 2023, where increased 5G coverage was stated as a lower priority than both fixed and 4G coverage.

> "5G is seen by many as a consumer technology rather than something the council would use to deliver services."

WHICH SECTORS/SERVICE AREAS DO YOU THINK WILL BENEFIT MOST FROM 5G IN YOUR LOCAL AUTHORITY?

Q.13
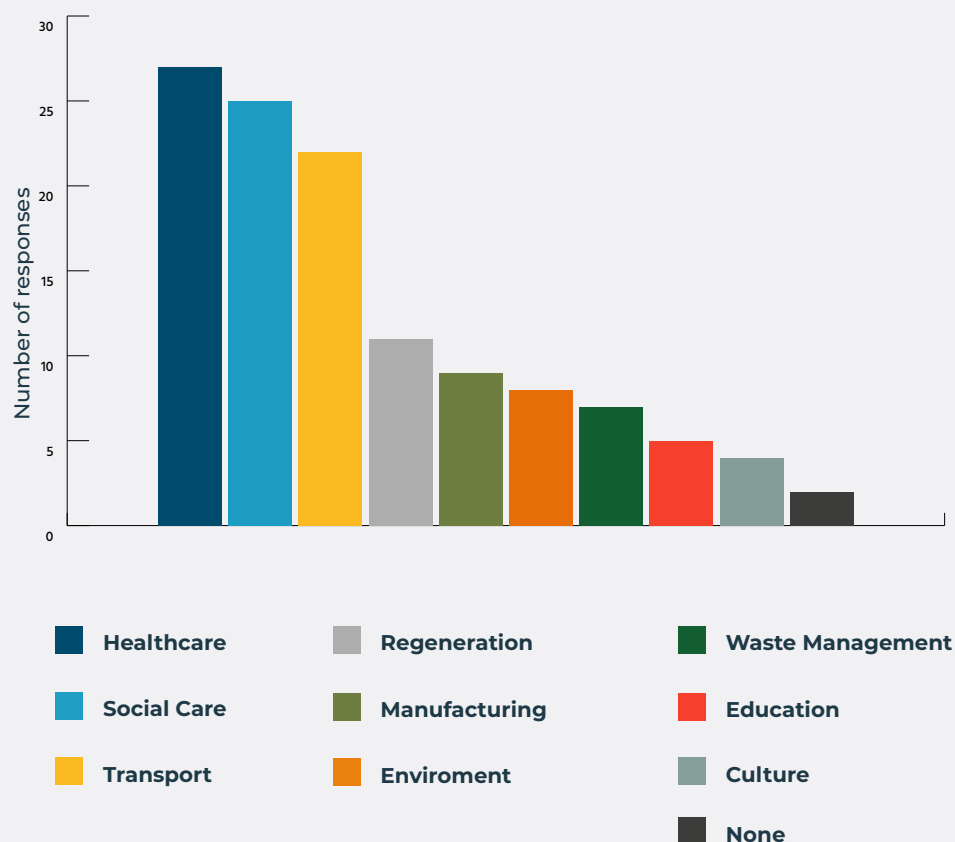
Health care, social care and transport are seen as the sectors which are most likely to see benefit from 5G with manufacturing, which is often cited as a major 5G use case, not being seen as a significant beneficiary. The results could be affected by a lack of major manufacturers in respondents' regions whereas the other sectors will be more common needs across all regions. The perceived importance of 5G in healthcare is interesting and worth exploring further as to the particular benefits that 5G can bring.

It is also interesting to see regeneration in 4th place, suggesting that it is seen as important to ensure 5G coverage is made available in areas of regeneration despite the current lack of 5G-specific use cases.

"We don't see a demand for 5G, there is no killer use case within the area as there's no major industry and it's mainly smaller SME's."
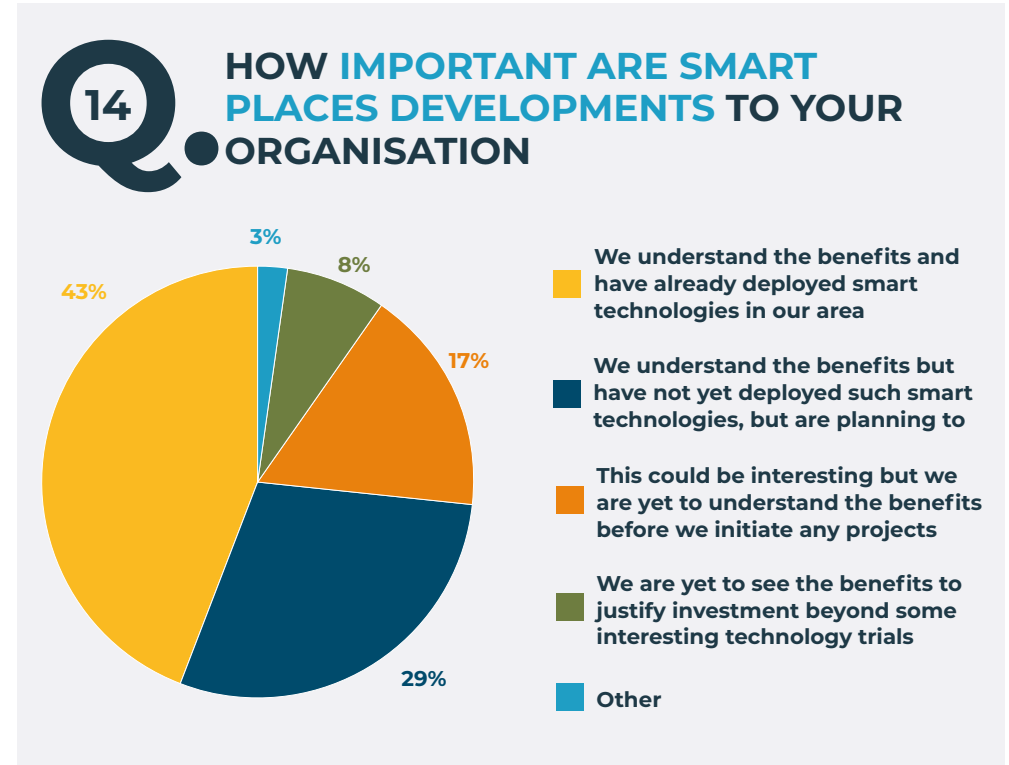
Smart Places

Smart Places

Smart Places is the term used to describe a town, a city, a village or even a community that is using data and emerging technology like IoT (Internet of Things) to address various local challenges such as minimising waste, optimising energy usage or reducing congestion.

The concept of Smart Cities is well established, with many successful examples of cities globally and within the UK using intelligent technology to enhance the quality of life in urban environments. This is made possible by combining existing datasets with new data captured by IoT devices, allowing nearly all elements of the urban landscape - including transit networks, energy grids, lighting systems and parking monitors – to wirelessly broadcast their state and activity in real-time. This enables dynamic monitoring of the place, helping to predict issues before they occur and optimising the delivery of resources or services to match demand.

Q14. HOW IMPORTANT ARE SMART PLACES DEVELOPMENTS TO YOUR ORGANISATION

- 43% / 3% / 8% / 17% / 29%

- We understand the benefits and have already deployed smart technologies in our area
- We understand the benefits but have not yet deployed such smart technologies, but are planning to
- This could be interesting but we are yet to understand the benefits before we initiate any projects
- We are yet to see the benefits to justify investment beyond some interesting technology trials
- Other

Although 43% of respondents stated that they understood the benefits of smart places and had already deployed some smart technologies in their area, the majority had not deployed, with around 25% questioning the benefits that could be delivered from smart technologies.

A likely factor holding back appetite to undertake smart place projects is that there is not a one-size-fits-all solution to individual local challenges that can be easily repeated, requiring careful consideration of what benefits are to be achieved to create a robust business case.

> *"Smart Places projects are currently seen as vanity projects, with no tangible business cases sitting behind them – they're not very well understood in terms of what they are, where they fit, despite some local examples of very successful implementations such as smart bins that could be deployed."*

> *"We have smart places ambitions but no defined plan. It feels like the focus is on cities whereas we would want to be a smart county. It's very early days in terms of established business cases for deployment with no real tangible / demonstrable benefits from many of the pilot projects."*

Taking time to look at the use cases and understanding what a 'smart' solution will provide allows the right processes to be designed to realise the desired benefits. There is little point in collecting 'smart' data if the resulting information isn't used to make decisions, improve how services are targeted, and react to events. We wanted to understand what sector use cases were seen as being the most beneficial.

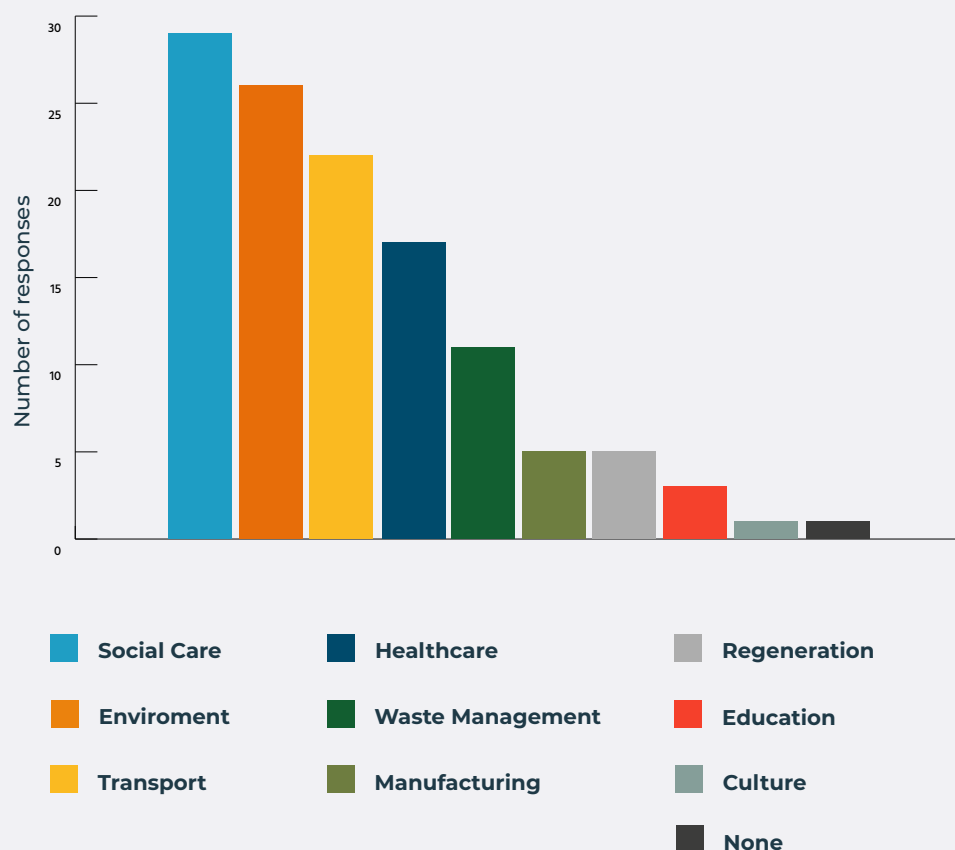**Why getting the governance right is vital to Smart Places project success**

Smart city technology like smart parking meters, smart bins or even smart air quality sensors can make a real difference in a community that requires smart problem solving. But deploying 'smart' solutions and then trying to identify the problems they can address isn't smart. Without clear, specific objectives, it can be difficult to get buy-in from both the people who need to implement the solutions and those it impacts, making it harder to demonstrate the value or benefits of individual solutions, and running the risk of wasting money on the wrong things.

In many cases, 'smart' solutions are aimed at improving existing services like waste management or public parking; however, without the necessary support of those responsible for delivering these services from the outset, it can be hard to persuade them to consider how 'smart' solutions would enhance their 'tried and tested' existing practices or to consider alternative ways of working.

A 'build-it and they will come' approach also risks stakeholders quickly losing confidence in 'smart' solutions. Without careful consideration of the desired outcome, even those deployed solutions may not address the problem alone, with other processes or culture changes often being needed to fully realise the desired outcome.

Read full article here.

Q.15

WHICH SECTORS/SERVICE AREAS DO YOU THINK WILL BENEFIT MOST FROM SMART PLACES INNOVATION IN YOUR LOCAL AUTHORITY?

Number of responses

Social Care · **Healthcare** · **Regeneration**
Enviroment · **Waste Management** · **Education**
Transport · **Manufacturing** · **Culture**
None

Social care followed by the environment are seen as the leading sectors that will see most benefit from smart technologies like IoT and associated data analysis. This may reflect the role local authorities have with telecare and environmental monitoring of both the local area and council assets such as buildings and social housing stock for which IoT sensors play a key role.

> "We actually started from a Smart City perspective rather than digital infrastructure, but quickly realised that the infrastructure needed to deliver our ambition wasn't available and so we started work on our digital infrastructure strategy to address this. Now that the digital infrastructure is largely there we are looking at how to make the best use of this to deliver services, increase digital inclusion, skills, etc"

> "We have a range of Smart Places / IoT projects ongoing including very successful CO2 monitoring in classrooms which was deployed during the pandemic and road temperature sensors to help target gritting routes. Our smart projects are generally at the pilot / proof of concept stage, and none are at the business case stage for BAU yet. All the smart projects have been externally funded thus far, with no investment needed by the council, however we appreciate this will have to change at some point."
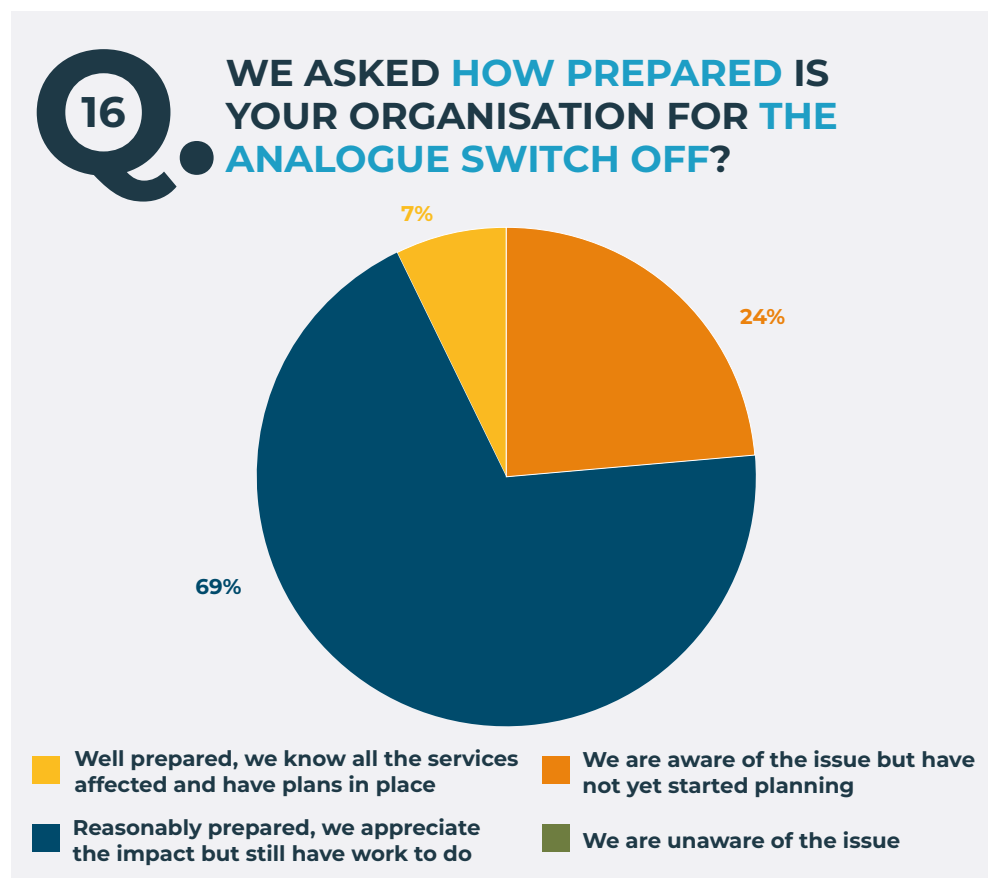
Service Switch-Offs

Service Switch-Offs

A number of widely used connectivity services are being switched off over the coming years as replacement technology delivers improved, more reliable solutions, and operators look to reduce their operating costs by decommissioning legacy infrastructure. We wanted to know if organisations knew about these plans and if they were well prepared.

THE ANALOGUE SWITCH-OFF

WE ASKED HOW PREPARED IS YOUR ORGANISATION FOR THE ANALOGUE SWITCH OFF?

Q.16

7%

24%

69%

■ Well prepared, we know all the services affected and have plans in place

■ Reasonably prepared, we appreciate the impact but still have work to do

■ We are aware of the issue but have not yet started planning

■ We are unaware of the issue

The analogue telephony switch-off is the most well-known of the switch-offs as it affects a wide range of services which are connected with analogue lines, not least telecare which is provided by local authorities. Around 70% of respondents thought themselves reasonably prepared although still had work to do. 24% were aware but had not yet started planning.

Whilst this is a generally positive picture with most local authorities actively working on mitigations, feedback gathered during our interviews with respondents alluded to some remaining uncertainty as to the full extent of the impact of the switch off over and above the more visible areas such as telecare. This suggests further work is still needed to ensure all affected services are migrated in time.

FarrPoint has created two interactive maps of the UK to help plan for the analogue switch-off:

Openreach switch-off – stop-sell dates map

Virgin Media O2 switch-off map – simply enter your postcode

"There is poor data and information available regarding the switch-offs – where, when, which premises impacted, etc. It all seems to be reliant on operators communicating with customers rather than centrally coordinated by OpenReach or central Government, and so communication is not always good enough."

farrpoint.com

THE COPPER SWITCH-OFF

Q. 17 HOW **WELL PREPARED** IS YOUR ORGANISATION FOR **THE COPPER SWITCH OFF**?
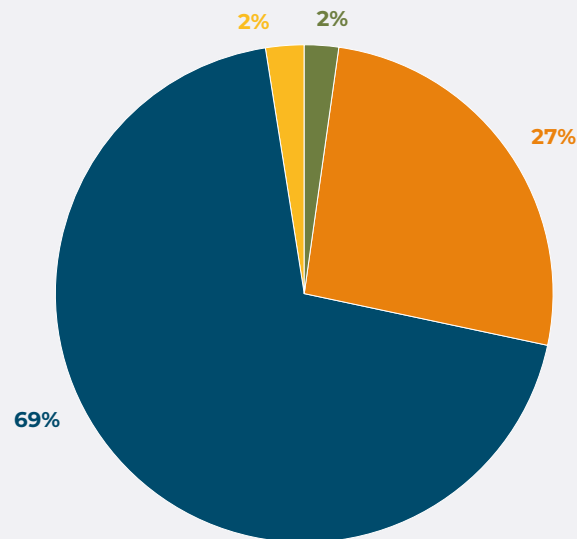
Pie chart:
- 2% — Well prepared, we know all the services affected and have plans in place
- 27% — We are aware of the issue but have not yet started planning
- 69% — Reasonably prepared, we appreciate the impact but still have work to do
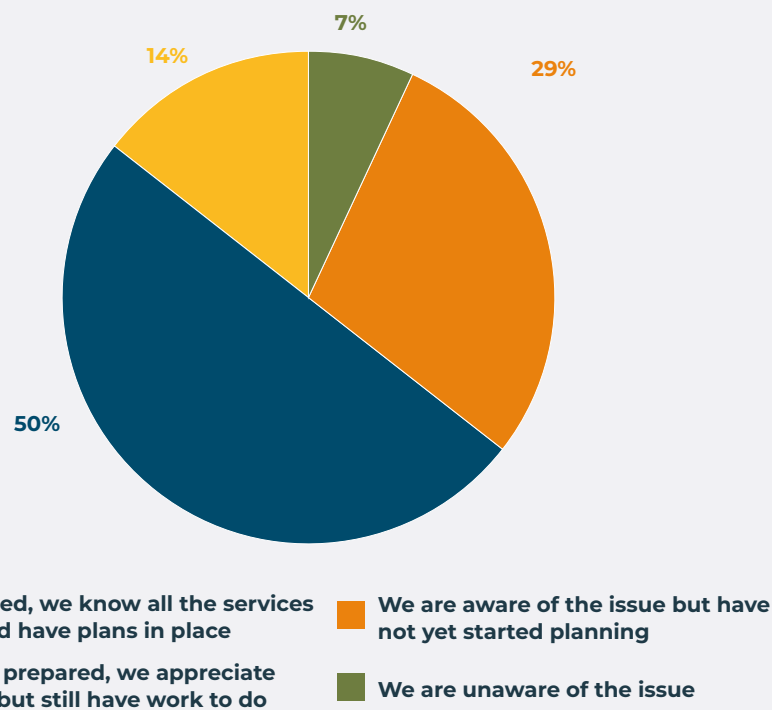- 2% — We are unaware of the issue

Legend:
- Well prepared, we know all the services affected and have plans in place
- We are aware of the issue but have not yet started planning
- Reasonably prepared, we appreciate the impact but still have work to do
- We are unaware of the issue

Fewer organisations are well prepared for the copper switch-off, which is the move from copper lines to other connectivity solutions such as fibre, and slightly more recognise they still have work to do to prepare. This will require an increased focus as time progresses if organisations are to avoid any impact on services.
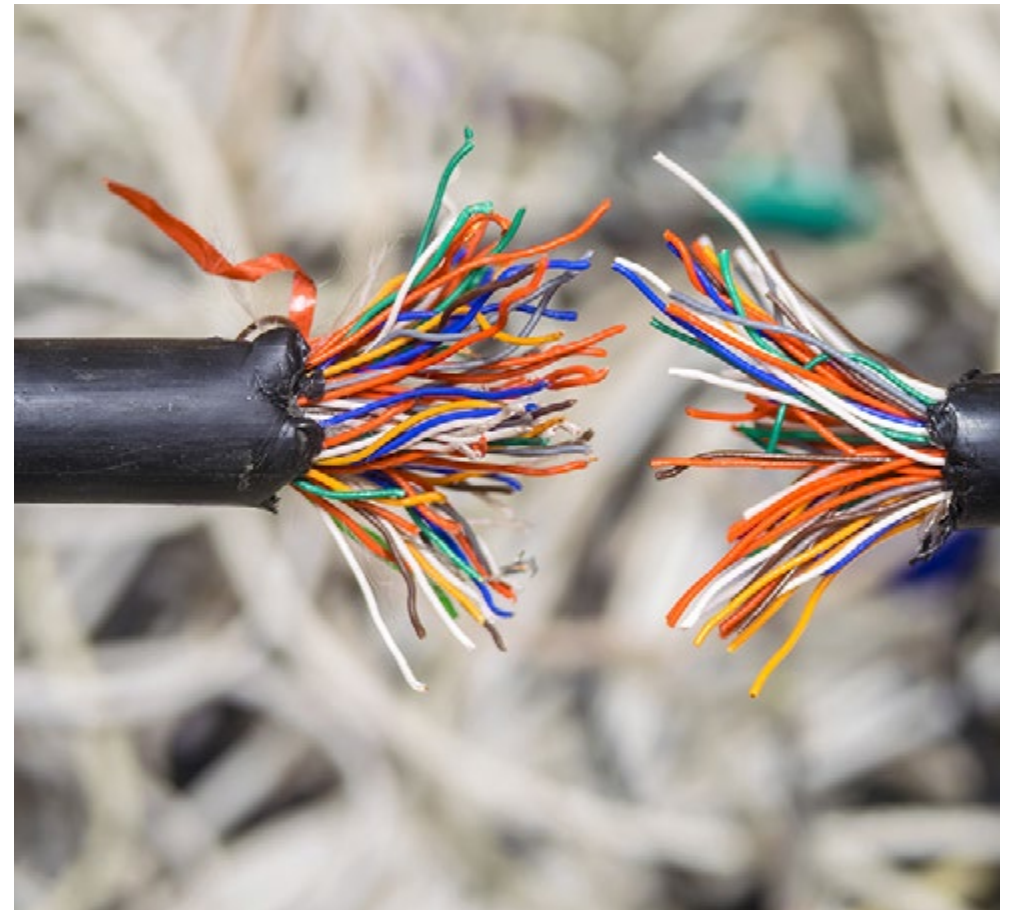
THE 2G AND 3G SWITCH-OFF

Q.18 HOW WELL PREPARED IS YOUR ORGANISATION FOR THE 2G AND 3G SWITCH-OFF?

7%

14%

29%

50%

- **Well prepared, we know all the services affected and have plans in place**
- **We are aware of the issue but have not yet started planning**
- **Reasonably prepared, we appreciate the impact but still have work to do**
- **We are unaware of the issue**

More organisations responded that they are well prepared for the 2G and 3G switch-off, although there are also a higher number of organisations who are unaware of the issue. Again, this will require greater focus as time progresses if organisations are to avoid any impact on services, for example some operators are prepared to sunset their 3G networks as soon as 2023*.

*Read more about the trio of these telecoms and telephony switch-offs in FarrPoint's latest guide "Connectivity changes".

"We are aware of the switch-offs but there is no planning within the organisation to deal with these yet. We are considering a comms strategy to better identify and understand the scale and scope of the challenge so that action can be taken. I was not initially aware of the copper switch-off until this survey, but after some investigation I now understand what this is and how it relates. Switch-off is particularly challenging to deal with due to the resources needed and a lack of any additional funding for the required changes."
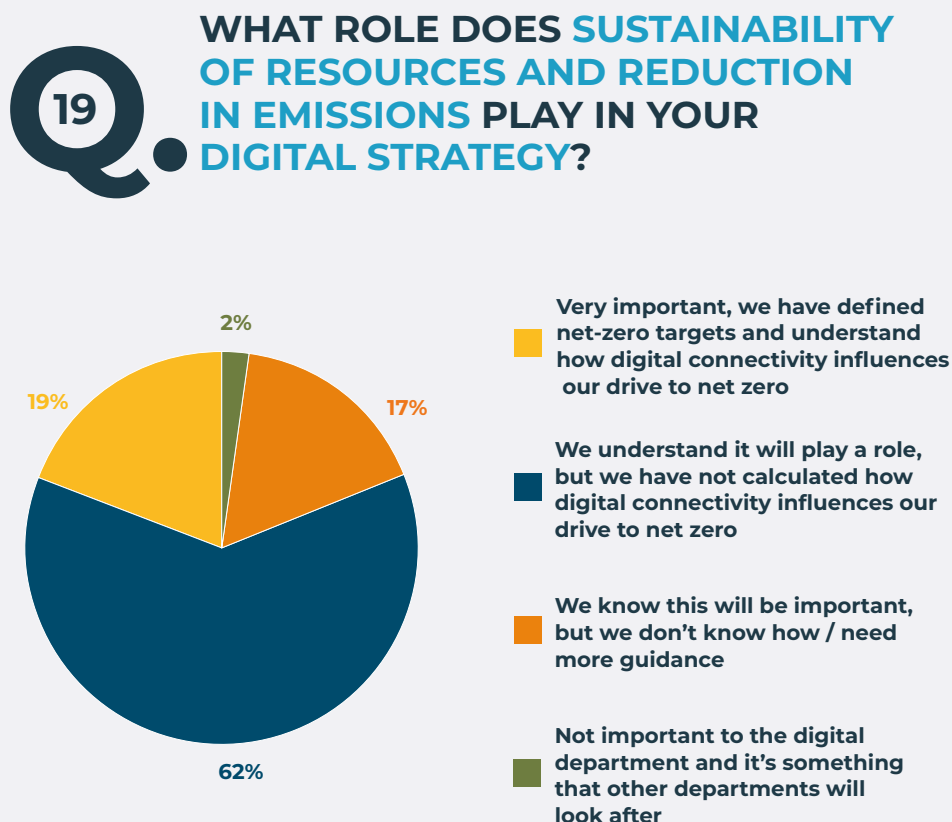
Connectivity & Reducing Emissions

Connectivity & Reducing Emissions

The role of connectivity in the drive to net-zero emissions can often be overlooked and yet the change in lifestyle and business operations that will be key to achieving these goals are underpinned by good connectivity. We wanted to understand how this concept was regarded by the local authorities.

Encouragingly, near 20% of respondents regard this topic as very important, have set net-zero targets and understand how connectivity influences the drive to net zero. The majority (62%) understand connectivity will play a role but have not yet calculated the extent. There is still education and guidance required in this area as shown by the 20% who stated that they were unsure of their role or where respondents don't believe it's a role for a digital department to consider.

This aligns with respondents' view that the least progress seen during 2022 was with respect to ensuring digital connectivity is aligned with net-zero targets despite most local authorities having declared climate emergencies in their area, suggesting this is an area where more needs to be done to help meet local and national targets.

Q.19 WHAT ROLE DOES SUSTAINABILITY OF RESOURCES AND REDUCTION IN EMISSIONS PLAY IN YOUR DIGITAL STRATEGY?

2%
19%
17%
62%

Very important, we have defined net-zero targets and understand how digital connectivity influences our drive to net zero

We understand it will play a role, but we have not calculated how digital connectivity influences our drive to net zero

We know this will be important, but we don't know how / need more guidance

Not important to the digital department and it's something that other departments will look after

Read the latest report that we produced at FarrPoint, highlighting the importance of digital technology and connectivity infrastructure in helping the UK reach its ambitious net-zero targets.

"We are seeing increased interest in net zero especially from highways and waste which has been constrained due to lack of internal resources to take projects forward. However we are now recruiting a dedicated net zero team to help progress this area"

"Net Zero is being driven by the Environment team who have had limited capacity and are not very familiar or confident with digital elements and are currently focussed on things like buildings environments. However, It will become more pressing with each year that passes in order to meet targets."

"We've made significant advances with digital connectivity and started on our smart city journey but we are keen to expand our role in net zero once the relevant team is in place."

About FarrPoint

FarrPoint is an independent connectivity and smart technology consultancy based in the UK.

We are a friendly team of consulting technologists, economists and data analysts, who believe that connectivity not only makes people's lives easier, brings huge economic benefits but can also help the UK reach its ambitious net-zero targets.

OUR SERVICES

Our team of consultants advise public and private sector organisations on the strategy, procurement and implementation of digital technology and connectivity infrastructure.

AREAS OF EXPERTISE

We specialise in a wide range of areas, including 4G & 5G, Digital Connectivity, Smart Places, Enterprise IT, Net-Zero, Networking, Technology-Enabled Care & more.

The approach that makes us go further:

PRAGMATISM

EMPATHY

DUTY OF CARE

Get in touch

farrpoint.com

contact@farrpoint.com

EDINBURGH

Exchange Place 2
5 Semple Street
Edinburgh
EH3 8BL

+44 (0)131 202 6018

NOVA SCOTIA, CANADA

1300-1969
Upper Water Street, Halifax
Nova Scotia, Canada
NS B3J 3R

+19025001414

LONDON

1st Floor
99 Bishopgate
London
EC2M 3XD

+44 (0)203 693 7310

MANCHESTER

3 Hardman Square
Spinningfields
Manchester
M3 3EB

+44 (0)161 669 5821