

Environment, Development and Transport Committee

Item No.

Report title:	Broadband, Mobile Phone and Digital – update from the Member Working Group
Date of meeting:	17 March 2017
Responsible Chief Officer:	Tom McCabe - Executive Director, Community and Environmental Services
Strategic impact The provision of reliable mobile phone coverage is a key factor to economic development in Norfolk. The following report provides an update from the Broadband, Mobile Phone and Digital Members Working Group on plans by operators and government to improve mobile phone coverage across the county.	

Executive summary

This report provides an update on the information gathered by the Broadband, Mobile Phone and Digital Members Working Group in relation to mobile phone coverage in Norfolk.

Norfolk County Council has no direct involvement in the provision of mobile phone coverage in Norfolk and so the work of the group has been focussed on gaining an insight into the current situation and understanding the actions being taken by operators and central government to help increase coverage. As agreed with the committee the action to contact the Minister to ask what intervention can be expected from central government to increase mobile coverage in Norfolk has been completed and we await a response.

This is the final report to Committee prior to the County Council elections at which point all Working Groups will cease to exist.

Recommendations:

- 1. To review the information provided.**
- 2. Acknowledge that the Working Group has been concluded ahead of the upcoming elections.**

1. Proposal

- 1.1. To review the latest information on the current progress of mobile coverage in Norfolk.

2. Evidence

- 2.1. There are four main mobile operators in the UK; EE, O2, Three and Vodafone. The working group has met with representatives from all of these providers. Although the providers remain commercially independent we have learnt that they have been working to share some mast sites. However, coverage in some locations remains poor with differing signal strength from different providers.
- 2.2. Mobile operators have an agreement with government to achieve 90% geographic voice coverage across the country by the end of 2017. We understand that operators are on track to meet this target and coverage is increasing. This is

based upon a £2.5 billion commercial investment and technical developments like the recently available 800 MHz frequency which allows signals to travel further and cover a wider area. However, it should be noted that the locations of the 90% geographic coverage is determined by operators.

- 2.3. It is expected that the Emergency Service Network (ESN), to be delivered by EE, will also expand mobile coverage. The ESN is the new communications system that will be used by the Police, Fire & Rescue, the Ambulance Service and other public safety users. This contract aims to improve connectivity for the emergency services, specifically providing better mobile connectivity focused around the road network.
- 2.4. Mobile coverage is measured in two ways, Indoor and Outdoor, with indoor coverage often weaker than outdoor. Where a property has access to a good fixed connection, most operators offer a booster which uses the fixed connection broadband to provide a strong mobile indoor signal.

2.5. Government Intervention

- 2.5.1. Unlike fixed connectivity, European State Aid rules mean that only very limited public subsidy can be used to invest in mobile infrastructure. Only locations that are classified as complete 'Not Spots', with no emergency phone signal available from any of the main four operators can attract public subsidy. This means that the provision of mobile infrastructure is largely dependent on commercial investment programmes.
- 2.5.2. The Government is reforming the Electronic Communications Code (ECC). The reformed ECC will make major reforms to the rights that communications providers have to access land. This will ensure property owners will be fairly compensated for use of their land. It also explicitly acknowledges the economic value for all of society created from investment in digital infrastructure. In this respect, it will put digital communications infrastructure on a similar regime to utilities like electricity and water. Ensuring the scope of these changes includes all infrastructure providers large or small and as quickly as possible is key.
- 2.5.3. New rights to upgrade and share infrastructure will allow future generations of technology to be quickly rolled out as it becomes commercially viable. This is particularly relevant for mobile infrastructure.
- 2.5.4. There will also be administrative changes to court processes to allow for improved dispute resolution, ensuring that disagreements between communications providers and landowners do not hold up investment and create uncertainty
- 2.5.5. During 2016, the Government consulted on reforms to the planning regime to support the mobile industry in the rapid rollout of 4G technology. The proposed reforms include:
 - Taller new ground based masts, increasing from 15 metres to 25 metres in non-protected areas
 - New masts of up to 20 metres in protected areas. This will involve local consultation
 - The ability to increase the height of existing masts to 20 – 25 metres in non-protected areas and 20 metres in protected areas
 - Lifting restrictions on the number of antennae allowed on structures over 30 metres
 - Lifting a variety of restrictions on smaller structures

- 2.5.6. It is recognised that local councils should work with local landowners to support the implementation of any changes made to the ECC and planning regime.
- 2.5.7. Of the £1 billion of digital investment announced in the Autumn Statement 2016, £600 million is to support trials of 5G mobile communications. The Government's Broadband Delivery UK Team advised the Better Broadband for Norfolk Programme Director that an announcement is expected on the budget defining the scope of the 5G trials.
- 2.6. The Member Working Group has shared the information which the four network operators are able to publically provide within the constraints of commercial confidentiality. Operators advise that customers should use a coverage checker to determine the best network for the places where they will be using their mobile phone. Most mobile phone operators have a coverage checker available on their own website but there is also a coverage checker available on the OFCOM website. <https://checker.ofcom.org.uk/mobile-coverage>
- 2.7. With the agreement of the Chair and Members of the EDT Committee the Chair of the Working Group has written to the Minister whose responsibilities include mobile phone provision enquiring as to when Norfolk can expect 100% mobile phone coverage. We currently await a response.

3. Background

- 3.1. The Government Response to the Review of the Electronic Communications Framework can be seen here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/response-to-review-of-the-electronic-communications-regulatory-framework>
- 3.2. More information about Mobile UK, the voice of the United Kingdom's mobile network operators, can be seen on their website: <http://www.mobileuk.org/about-mobile-uk.html>
- 3.3. Terms of Reference - Broadband, Mobile phone and Digital Member Working Group

Membership of Working Group:

Cllr Dr Marie Strong (Chair)	Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group
Cllr Dr Andrew Boswell	Green Group
Cllr Bert Bremner	Labour Group
Cllr Judy Leggett	Conservative Group
Cllr Richard Bird	UKIP and Independent Group

Officers Supporting the Working Group

Miss Karen O'Kane	Programme Director – Better Broadband for Norfolk
Miss Maria Thurlow	Business Development Officer
Other Officers, as needed	

Purpose and Objectives:

To develop a more in-depth knowledge of Broadband, Mobile Phone and Digital issues across Norfolk to inform and make recommendations to the EDT Committee.

The Working group will aim to:

1. Scrutinise the current situation in Norfolk and continually review how current plans are progressing.
2. Identify how to achieve the best possible Broadband, Mobile Phone and DAB coverage for Norfolk

The work of the group will include liaison with and gathering information from relevant stakeholders and interested parties including government bodies, MPs, service providers, Norfolk residents and businesses etc.

Officer Contact

If you have any questions about matters contained in this paper or want to see copies of any assessments, e.g. equality impact assessment, please get in touch with:

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