

# Digital Innovation and Efficiency Committee

Item No.

<b>Report title:</b>	<b>Mobile Telecommunications</b>
<b>Date of meeting:</b>	<b>22 January 2018</b>
<b>Responsible Chief Officer:</b>	<b>Executive Director, Community and Environmental Services, Executive Director, Finance and Commercial Services</b>

## Strategic impact

While the successful Better Broadband for Norfolk Programme has dramatically improved the availability and performance of fixed internet connectivity, the coverage of good mobile voice and data connectivity lags some way behind.

The availability of ubiquitous, fast, reliable mobile voice and data coverage would provide significant benefits for economic development and improved quality of life for the people who live, visit and work in Norfolk.

The committee is committed to working with mobile network operators to improve coverage and this engagement with the four main suppliers has been scheduled to better understand current investment plans and investigate mutually beneficial opportunities.

## Executive summary

The focus of Norfolk County Council and its partners on broadband provision in the county has seen Superfast coverage improve from below 50% just a few years ago to 90% today, with firm plans to rise to at least 95% by April 2020. The council is also pursuing opportunities to increase availability of Ultrafast connectivity via fibre to the premise (FTTP).

Meanwhile mobile telecommunications facilities have failed to improve at anywhere near the same pace, not least because government funding has only been available to support fixed broadband.

In November 2017 the committee agreed to commission an independent study of mobile coverage across the county which is currently out to tender, due for award this month and completion in time for the March committee meeting. The committee has committed to making this data publicly available and sharing it with the mobile network operators in order to help target investments and improve future coverage.

Given that the Council and the telecommunications providers clearly have a shared interest in providing good coverage across the county, this agenda item has been scheduled so the committee members can meet with the four main providers of mobile networks in the county (EE, Telefonica/O2, Three and Vodafone) and their representative trade body Mobile UK.

The purpose of the discussion is to review the following topics.

- Current coverage levels.

- Existing investment plans (where not commercially sensitive).
- How the Councils coverage mapping exercise, use of building assets and planning responsibilities might be used to assist the suppliers to further improve coverage.
- Any other barriers or opportunities which the County might be able to influence.

### Recommendations:

1. **That the committee consider the information provided by the mobile network operators and explore what the council can do to facilitate improved mobile voice and data coverage and performance across Norfolk.**

## 1. The Background and Context

- 1.1. The current mobile phone coverage levels across Norfolk leave much to be desired and are a source of considerable frustration to residents, visitors and local businesses

Norfolk county council therefore wishes to use its assets and its influence to improve the consistency and quality of mobile voice and data coverage across the county. This engagement with the four main suppliers is intended as an initial meeting to investigate what plans are already in place to make improvements and how the council might be able to accelerate the process.

The Eastern daily press surveyed 1,300 readers in October last year and showed poor coverage had caused 86pc of people problems, with 40pc rating their coverage as one out of 10.



*Some areas of Norfolk and Suffolk (in red) still do not get any phone signal, according to this map from regulator Ofcom. Image: Ofcom*

## 2. Scope of the proposed Exercise

- 2.1. Further dialogue with the suppliers will be undertaken once the survey has been completed and coverage maps are available. The committee will investigate the opportunity to use its assets, policies and influence to facilitate improvements in coverage and performance. These dialogues will result in an action plan, the content of which is as yet unknown.

## 2.2. **Timing**

The initial public discussions with the four main suppliers will take place at the committee meeting on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of January. Follow up meetings will be scheduled as required and the mobile coverage maps will be published in March 2018.

## 3. **Financial Implications**

- 3.1. There are no financial implications for the Council at this time over and above the survey which has already been approved. However, there are financial implications for businesses across the county due to the gaps in good quality mobile voice and data coverage.

## 4. **Issues, risks and innovation**

- 4.1. There are no specific risks arising as a result of this item.

### **Officer Contact**

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

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