

Environment, Development and Transport Committee

Item No.

Report title:	Broadband, Mobile Phone and Digital – update from the Member Working Group
Date of meeting:	11th November 2016
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 sets out an update from the Broadband, Mobile Phone and Digital Members Working Group in relation to mobile phone and digital coverage in Norfolk.

Since the last update to Committee in July 2016 the Working Group continues to track progress on mobile and digital coverage across Norfolk.

Recommendations:

- 1. To consider the information provided and the progress being made.**
- 2. To agree that the next update to Committee will be in April 2017.**

1. Proposal

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

2. Evidence

- 2.1. Update on Working Group Membership

The Working Group welcomed Cllr Jim Perkins as the UKIP representative on the all-party group.

- 2.2. In September the Working Group welcomed William Comery, representing the mobile operator Three and Alex Jackman from EE. The working Group has now met with all four of the major mobile operators; having met with Vodafone and Cornerstone Telecommunications Infrastructure Limited (CTIL) in March and O2 Telefonica and CTIL in June.

- 2.3. On each occasion the operators answered questions posed by the Working Group to indicate what work is being done to improve coverage in the County and what challenges they face when trying to improve infrastructure. The future plans from all operators remain commercially sensitive but the working group was able to ascertain some common issues faced by all operators. These issues were summarised by Hamish MacLeod at MobileUK – an organisation

representing mobile network operators and the replacement to the Mobile Operators Association.

- 2.4. Mr MacLeod explained their view that consumers in the UK benefit from the competition between network operators which is why future plans are not coordinated and remain commercially sensitive. However there is a binding agreement between operators and Government that operators would ensure 90% voice coverage across the UK geographic area by the end of 2017. Mr MacLeod added that the network expansion is on track to meet this commitment and operators will meet this licence condition.

We have also learnt that a by-product of this expansion is that 4G data coverage will increase and this should be evident in the OFCOM's annual 'Connected Nations Report' which is usually published in December.

- 2.5. Mr MacLeod advises that the government is also delivering on their commitments with the reform of the Electronic Communications Code. He explains that *'The ECC reform should make it more viable for operators to deploy new infrastructure – a factor that will be particularly important in rural areas, and the granting of new permitted development rights.'*
- 2.6. The Working Group also learnt that the development of the new Emergency Services Network (ESN) could lead to further improvements in network coverage. The ESN is the communication system that will be used by the Police, Fire & Rescue, the Ambulance Service and other public safety users. It replaces the current system, called Airwave, and looks to use parts of EE's existing commercial 4G network. Mr Macleod said that 'where public money is used to subsidise ESN expansion in rural areas, the infrastructure will be made available to all mobile operators.'
- 2.7. We have also learnt that there are no specific government plans for another Mobile Infrastructure Project (MIP). As reported previously to this Committee the Mobile Infrastructure Project was a government led scheme that intended to target 'not spot' areas where no signal is present and not even emergency calls could be made. MobileUK explain that the government will review the coverage situation once the 90% coverage target has been achieved and ESN has been deployed.
- 2.8. Mr MacLeod adds that 'Mobile Operators fully understand that customers want better coverage and capacity to sustain their ever increasing use of mobile devices, at home and on the move. He said that Mobile UK are working hard with their stakeholders on policy that will facilitate this: ECC reform, an easier planning regime, more backhaul and improving the investment case.'
- 2.9. Mr MacLeod also mentioned that improvements to the fixed Broadband infrastructure are also helpful for mobile networks as it can make connecting masts to the core network more straightforward.

An update on the Better Broadband for Norfolk programme continues to be provided to the Working group and was circulated to Members. This included an independent report on fixed line broadband in Norfolk covering all providers which can be found online at the following address:

<http://labs.thinkbroadband.com/local/index.php?area=E10000020>

Further detail on the Better Broadband for Norfolk programme is provided in a separate report to this committee by the Programme Director of Better

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 MobileUK, the voice of the United Kingdom's mobile network operators, can be seen on their website: <http://www.mobileuk.org/about-mobile-uk.html>

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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