

# Digital Innovation and Efficiency Committee

Item No.

<b>Report title:</b>	<b>Local Planning Processes and Broadband Provision</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**

Access to broadband is a vital component of infrastructure in today's world. It is key to growing a sustainable local economy, vital for education and home working and an increasingly central part of community cohesion and resilience, particularly in rural areas like Norfolk.

The availability, reliability and speed of broadband provision is now a key consideration for house buyers as well as tourists and many view it as essential as the standard utilities. Similarly, it is also a key concern for the business sector.

In addition, Local Authorities are increasingly reliant on digital infrastructure to provide services and interact with their customers. This is recognised across Norfolk and demonstrated through the investments in the Better Broadband for Norfolk (BBfN) programme which is funded by the county, districts, private sector and central government.

Planning policy can play a role in helping to achieve the transformation in broadband provision. Therefore, Norfolk County Council with its highways responsibilities and the district councils as Local Planning Authorities (LPA) have a pivotal role to play in encouraging and supporting developers to future-proof their developments and maximise their value by installing high speed broadband.

Although the County Council is not an LPA it can still use its influence to help persuade Norfolk's districts to consistently incorporate broadband promoting policies and push for faster gigabit connections using fibre to the premises (FTTP) where possible.

The committee is committed to ensure that all new residential and business developments incorporate the highest speed broadband connections that are cost effective.

## **Executive summary**

Despite the focus of Norfolk County Council and its partners on broadband provision in the county which has seen Superfast coverage reach around 90% today, with firm plans to rise to over 95% by April 2020, some new developments are still being built without broadband connections.

The committee wishes to ensure that wherever possible all new residential and business developments incorporate high speed broadband connections.

Although Government and the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) both support and encourage the inclusion of high speed broadband, there are no statutory requirements which support this aspiration. Therefore it is recommended that in order to maximise the likelihood of all new developments benefitting from Superfast (24mbps+) or preferably Ultrafast (up to 1000mbps) connections the council uses its direct controls and its influence in the following ways.

1. Review district (LPA) planning policies to ensure they promote high speed broadband connectivity. If not already in place the committee should lobby LPAs to propose that wording (based on best practice locally and in counties such as Kent & Hampshire) is incorporated to promote the deployment of fibre broadband and state a preference for FTTP to future proof the connectivity, particularly for business developments and those in urban areas. This might take the form of a letter from the chair of this committee with proposed wording to be incorporated, plus direct engagement through elected members that have both county and district responsibilities.
2. The cost for developers to deploy high speed broadband is generally cost neutral or positive based on the resultant increase in property values. However, this is not always the cost for smaller developments if fibre circuits are not available nearby and excess construction charges arise. This situation will improve as BBfN rolls out further into rural areas and as network operators provide fibre connections to more locations across the county. It is therefore proposed that NCC should consult with the broadband network companies to establish how its highways policies and procedures can be optimised to improve the pace and scope of fibre installation across the county.

#### **Recommendations:**

1. **Review current LPA policies and lobby to update where necessary to ensure that high speed broadband is promoted.**
2. **Encourage FTTP over FTTC to maximise connection speeds and futureproof the installation.**
3. **Work with broadband companies to ensure highways policies and procedures speed up deployment and encourage further investment.**

## **1. The Background and Context**

- 1.1. Members of the committee have been made aware of new developments that have been built without broadband connectivity and wanted to investigate what the committee could do to stop this happening in future.

This paper has been written in order to consider the scope of actions available.

In addition to the reputational and wider economic benefits of ensuring that residents can access high speed broadband when they move into new developments, there is also the issue of avoiding the costs and frustrations to occupiers of future retrofitting if the infrastructure is not fit for purpose.

## **2. Scope of the proposed Exercise**

- 2.1. To improve coverage for new developments NCC should work with the districts,

encourage developers and meet with broadband suppliers to see how the county's highways related planning activities can be optimised to remove any barriers to deploying more fibre and encourage further investment in the County.

The review of district policies could be undertaken quickly and at minimal cost. Collation and distribution of best practice policies and guidance could be quickly established through officer and member networks and re-used locally.

Meetings between the main suppliers, members and relevant officers could be quickly scheduled in order to establish what changes, if any should be made to existing highways planning policies and procedures.

## 2.2. **Timing**

Initial findings could be developed and fed back to the March committee meeting.

## 3. **Financial Implications**

3.1. There are no financial implications for the Council at this time.

## 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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