

Digital Innovation and Efficiency Committee

Item No.

Report title:	Mobile Telecommunications
Date of meeting:	06 March 2018
Responsible Chief Officer:	Tom McCabe – Executive Director, Community and Environmental Services, Simon George – Executive Director, Finance and Commercial Services

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. A mobile voice and data audit has been commissioned in order to better inform this dialogue and also to provide high quality up-to-date information to Norfolk's residents and businesses.

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) and support alternative network providers.

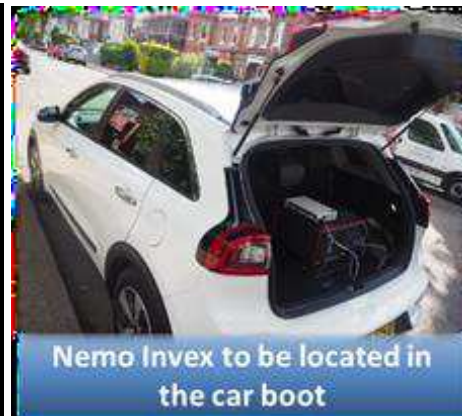
Meanwhile mobile telecommunications facilities have failed to improve at anywhere near the same pace, not least because government funding has only been available to support fixed broadband.

In November 2017 the committee agreed to commission an independent study of mobile coverage across the county. The tender process was completed in January and a specialist supplier called AWTG was the successful bidder.

In addition to the high-quality data collected by AWTG directly, they have agreed to work collaboratively with NCC to identify local community groups and organisations (or NCC staff and vehicles) that could be used to complement the data from AWTG. This could provide a mechanism for updating the data in future to show how progress is being made.

AWTG have experience in making recommendations to the main four mobile network operators to improve their coverage and will bring this experience in support of NCC and network operator discussions.

The pictures below show the equipment that is being used to conduct the survey in car and on foot.



Recommendations:

1. That the committee note the information regarding progress with the survey.
2. To agree to a receive a briefing from AWTG on the final results of the survey after completion on the 22nd March.
3. Approve plans to use the data in further dialogue with mobile network operators to drive coverage improvements through access to public sector buildings and where possible fibre backhaul.
4. To publish the findings on the councils Internet site to help residents and businesses to make better informed mobile telephony buying decisions.
5. To consider options for a periodic refresh of the data.

1 The Background and Context

- 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 survey and engagement with the four main suppliers is intended to enable use of council and other public sector structures to host equipment to fill current gaps in coverage. Where possible, fibre backhaul will also be provided to improve mobile data capacity.

2 Scope of the proposed Exercise

- 2 The survey is underway and are due to be completed on the 6th March 2018 (and then analysed and mapped). The survey is being undertaken by 6 employees of AWTG, 2 each in 2 vans and 2 in a walking group. This is allowing coverage of all the areas scoped out through the procurement exercise, including some areas that can only be accessed on foot.

The map below shows the routes that are being covered by the survey.



2 Timing

The survey results will be published in late March 2018 and can be used immediately thereafter to enter into the next phase of dialogue with the mobile network operators.

Repeat survey frequency should be considered based on (a) the mechanism and costs involved and (b) how quickly the coverage is likely to improve.

There are a few options available to us to refresh the data.

- AWTG could be commissioned to repeat survey activity in areas where coverage is shown to be absent or limited.
- We could deploy the same or similar equipment with community groups or council staff and vehicles
- We could provide staff and residents with an app that maps coverage as they carry out their day to day activities.

Although the last option has the lowest cost, it will also provide the lowest quality results and would not be at the level of accuracy required by the mobile network operators to inform their plans to site new transmitters. AWTG have committed to work with us to provide options for involvement of staff and community groups in ongoing survey work, and so we will receive their advice when they present their findings.

3 Financial Implications

- 3 The survey is being undertaken well within the budget allocated for the work. It is expected that the hosting of equipment on Council owned structures will pay for the cost of the survey. However, the primary objective of the exercise is to improve mobile voice and data coverage across the county to benefit residents, businesses, wider economic

growth and better mobile working for Norfolk's staff.

4 Issues, risks and innovation

4 The risks in terms of time, cost and quality of the mobile coverage audit have been minimised through the procurement exercise and management of the supplier. AWTG has completed similar exercise in the past for the Scottish and Irish governments as well as the LEP in Worcestershire and are experienced in providing data to the mobile network operators at the level of quality they require to inform their future service planning needs. Norfolk Police have been informed of the exercise and have given their approval. There are no further specific risks arising because of this item. This exercise is highly innovative as this appears to be the first time it has been commissioned by a local authority and linked to the promotion of public sector assets for improved coverage. The department of Digital, Media, Culture and Sport have heard about this innovative approach and have asked to meet with NCC representatives to find to more.

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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