

25 MAY 2017

NEW FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

Minutes of a meeting of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Panel held in Committee Room 3.2, Appletree Court, Lyndhurst on Thursday, 25 May 2017

- * Cllr M R Harris (Chairman)
- * Cllr M A Steele (Vice-Chairman)

Councillors:

- * A R Alvey
- * W G Andrews
- M J Kendal
- Mrs A E McEvoy

Councillors:

- * A D O'Sullivan
- * A K Penson
- * D B Tipp
- * C A Wise

*Present

In attendance:

Councillor:

J D Heron, Portfolio Holder Finance & Efficiency

Officers Attending:

Mrs F Churchill, C Elliott, R Beere, A Bethune, M Callaghan, Mrs R Drummond, Mrs R Rutins and Mrs M Sandhu

Also In Attendance:

Mr P Bloggs, Assistant Director, Transformation, Hampshire County Council
Mr G Munn, British Telecom Group
Mr G Peacey, Programme Manager, Superfast Broadband, Hampshire County Council
Mr R Horne, Brockenhurst Parish Council
Mr F Norris, Beaulieu Parish Council
Mr P Wales, Chairman, Brockenhurst Parish Council

Apologies:

None were received.

3 MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meetings held on 16 March and 15 May 2017 be signed by the Chairman as correct records.

4 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made by any member in connection with an agenda item.

5 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

No issues were raised during the public participation period.

6 PROVISION OF BROADBAND IN THE NEW FOREST

The Panel received a progress report on the Hampshire Broadband Programme together with input from representatives of Hampshire County Council and British Telecom on developments.

Mr Bloggs provided an update on the Hampshire Superfast Broadband (HSB) programme since his last attendance at the Panel in 2016 when he had outlined the very specific circumstances in the Forest.

The programme for Hampshire had a budget of approximately £30m, and mainly consisted of two contracts; Contract 1 (£10m), and Contract 2, (£18m); plus a Rural Communities Broadband Fund (£1m); and an Innovation Fund (£1.2m).

Overall, the programme was on schedule, with Contract 1 about to conclude, having delivered superfast broadband to over 80,000 premises, achieving around 90% coverage across the County to date. It was anticipated that Contract 2 would increase coverage further to 95%.

Earlier this year, the County Council had signed a Change Request with BT for £6.8m, which would involve 8500 premises and extend coverage still further to over 97%.

In respect of the New Forest, it was noted that at the start of the project, coverage was below 70% (compared with 80% nationally); and was currently at 90% (one of the largest gains in Hampshire); with coverage expected to reach 95% by the end of the second contract.

It was reported that 111 broadband cabinets had been delivered so far, compared to 83 in November 2015, with another 160 planned and further cabinets envisaged. To date the project had produced 52km of routed fibre in the Forest.

Mr Bloggs underlined the particular challenges for the New Forest, particularly the rural nature of the area, land use sensitivities within the constraints of a National Park, and complex land ownership and approvals issues, meaning that disproportionate effort (and funding) had been put into installing broadband in the area, which posed a challenge in terms of value for money. Despite this, good progress had been made.

Mr Bloggs and his colleagues had been working with local stakeholders – (National Park Authority, Natural England, this Council; the Forestry Commission and the Verderers), to explain the proposals for the location of specific cabinets and to seek approval in principle on them before submission to Verderers' Court.

It was noted that take up of Broadband was 38% in the New Forest, compared to more than 40% in Hampshire. The Council could play a part in helping to promote take up and this would be pursued by the officers.

Action: Matt Callaghan

The Chairman thanked Mr Bloggs and his colleagues for the detailed information and statistics, but emphasised that there were still significant numbers of premises in the Forest that did not have acceptable broadband facilities.

The Chairman felt that, given that internet access was increasingly seen as 'The 4th Utility' (alongside gas, water and electricity), developers should be under a planning obligation to ensure that new build houses were supplied with superfast broadband. It was suggested that one way of achieving this might be to await the Local Plan Review, and to suggest the introduction of a planning presumption that new builds will include superfast broadband. It was agreed that the Panel make a recommendation to the appropriate committees and officers to this effect.

Action: Flo Churchill

The Chairman invited representatives from two parish councils to make comments and ask questions relating to broadband provision in their areas.

Mr Wales, Chairman of Brockenhurst Parish Council, explained that parts of Brockenhurst had been waiting some time for Superfast Broadband (SFBB). Delays had been due to complex permissions required from multiple agencies. There had also been difficulties obtaining power supply, issues with repairs to ducts, and other obstacles. Completion overall had been promised for June 2016, and a year on, had yet to be resolved. The Parish Council had given help where requested. The Parish Council sought clarification on the finish date for the project. In reply, the representative of the County Council and BT Openreach explained that a great deal of effort had gone in to overcoming the difficulties, which were described in detail. A number of repairs and remedial works had to be undertaken before certain work could be done, and alternative options had been considered. The Parish Council representatives pointed out that these issues had been known about for over a year, and there had been a lack of communication.

Mr Norris, Chairman of Beaulieu Parish Council, expressed similar concerns about prolonged delays with SFBB provision and lack of communication.

In both cases there had been delays due to difficulties obtaining permissions, remedial works required to facilitate cabling, positioning of cabinets, provision of related power supplies, and poor communications.

Mr Munn explained that there had been a lot of learning from the installations process and technology was changing all the time. The importance of good communications was acknowledged.

It was noted that 99% of the Forest now had broadband of at least 2mb per second. Superfast Broadband was deemed to be 24 mb per second.

Panel Members reported various pockets of the Forest which were not connected, notably 84 houses in Burley, and parts of Minstead.

Some members felt that the overall County contract framework was set up to target easier areas first, which left areas such as the New Forest at a disadvantage.

Mr Bloggs noted members' concerns and acknowledged the importance of good communications. He offered to attend future meetings of the Panel with his colleagues to give further updates as required. The Chairman asked that a further session be included in the work programme.

The Chairman pointed out that as well as trying to pursue the matter on behalf of residents and local businesses, the Council had an interest in the matter as it was trying to transform its services and channel its business online, which should result in significant savings. He asked what the Council could do to assist.

Mr Bloggs suggested that, if possible, the Council might assist locally in liaising with organisations such as Natural England and the Verderers, to help resolve any permissions issues for broadband provision in the District. He also asked that the Council do what it could to encourage the take up of Broadband in the District.

Action : Matt Callaghan

The Chairman thanked the representatives of the County Council, British Telecom Group and the Parish participants for their input and asked that a further update be scheduled for 12 months' time.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Council continues to support the work of Hampshire County Council and BT in developing the broadband network throughout the New Forest;
- (b) That support should continue to be provided (by this Council's Economic Development team) for communities who wished to design and deliver their own private broadband schemes through use of the Council's Broadband tool;
- (c) That officers assist as far as possible in liaising with organisations such as Natural England and the Verderers and other organisations, to help resolve any local permissions issues for broadband provision in the District;
- (d) That the County Council, British Telecom Group and Parish participants be invited to provide further updates in 12 months' time.
- (e) That officers be requested to consider measures for inclusion in the Local Plan Review, for a planning presumption that new builds will include superfast broadband.

7 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE AND PROVISIONAL BUDGET OUTTURN REPORT 2016/17

The Panel noted the annual performance and provisional budget outturn for 2016/17.

Appendix 1 to the report showed some of the council's key achievements and key data for 2016/17, while Appendix 2 illustrated the key delivery actions for 2017/18, which would contribute towards meeting forecasted funding reductions over the next few years. The Panel also noted the provisional outturn position for the General Fund, Capital Programme and Housing Revenue Account.

The provisional revenue outturn was reported as showing an overall saving of £3.084m.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

8 KEY ACTIONS AND SERVICE REVIEW PROGRAMMES - FINAL UPDATE REPORT 2016/17

The Panel received a brief update on the key delivery actions and a summary of the completed service reviews in 2016/17.

The Panel noted that annual ongoing savings identified from completed reviews amounted £519,000.

9 DEMOCRATIC ENGAGEMENT

The Panel considered whether to establish a Task and Finish Group to examine possible revised democratic arrangements.

It was noted that there had been no review of decision making structures since the Cabinet system was introduced in the year 2000.

Some members queried whether the review was necessary, as they felt that communities were not concerned with the Council's internal structures and that they only engaged with the Council when they needed to. Previous attempts at involving the public in the Council's business had had little success.

Members discussed briefly the respective merits of the Cabinet and Committee systems. The Cabinet had in the past held its meetings at various places in the community, but with mixed success and engaging the public was a difficult issue.

Some members felt that the focus of contact with communities was, and would continue to be, through customer service. It was explained that the project might be more concerned with public participation or area forums on particular topics. However, it was hoped the project could facilitate member / community engagement.

It was considered that, given the overall scale of transformation and change in Council services and officer structures over recent times, a Task and Finish Group could consider the scope of the project and examine whether there might be a useful way forward.

Members felt that a short review including an examination of arrangements at other authorities might be a useful way of informing the need for any potential changes.

RESOLVED:

That a Task and Finish Group of approximately 4 to 5 members be set up with the following terms of reference:

"To review the current decision-making arrangements (insofar as is permissible by law) to seek to improve community access to and involvement in the democratic process."

10 FILM NEW FOREST - PROGRESS UPDATE

The Panel received a report on the progress of Film New Forest in its first year, as well as future development of the initiative. It was noted that the financial gain to the Forest was estimated at £45,000 per day when filming.

RESOLVED:

That support for the Film New Forest Project be maintained in order that the progress made to date may be built upon and further sector related benefit could be brought to local businesses.

11 WORK PROGRAMME

The Panel received a cyber security update from Mr Beere, ICT Service Manager.

It was explained that security was one of the strengths of the Council's ICT service. A recent Ransom Ware attack nationally had highlighted a number of additional actions required to reduce the likelihood of an attack on the Council's systems. On the whole, systems that were vulnerable to the Ransom Ware attack were older versions of software such as XP. This did not apply to this Council but had proved to be an issue for the NHS.

A Council login message to staff was being introduced, reminding employees about caution when opening emails and attachments. Robust systems were in place to deal with virus attacks and although there could not be guarantees, the Council was in a good place in respect of its systems. The Council liaised closely with the County Council.

The Chairman thanked Mr Beere for his reassuring update.

Other updates were given relating to the Panel's work programme.

It was noted that the Customer Service Task and Finish Group was meeting in June following analysis work on top website tasks, and a visit to Aylesbury Vale Council was planned.

The Chairman proposed a number of actions relating to future Task and Finish Group work.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the following members be appointed to the Citizens' Advice Bureau Task and Finish Group, with the following Terms of Reference;

Mrs D Andrews
P Armstrong
Ms K Crisell
S Davies
L Harris
M Harris
J Heron
A O'Sullivan
Miss A Sevier
A Wade
M White

Proposed Terms of Reference

- (1) To understand the role played by the CAB in the New Forest.
 - (2) To understand what customers want and need from the CAB in the New Forest.
 - (3) To work with the new CAB Chief Executive to modernise the service provided by the CAB and how it reaches out to the community.
 - (4) To agree new management arrangements with the CAB to enable longer term financial planning for mutual benefit.
- (b) That a Council Tax Reduction Task and Finish Group be set up comprising Cllrs Steele, Penson, J Heron and M Harris.
- (c) That a Budget Task and Finish Group be set up, to include Cllrs O'Sullivan, M Harris, Steele and Penson, and that further members be sought from the council via an email.

12 PORTFOLIO HOLDERS' UPDATES

The Panel received an update from the Finance and Efficiency Portfolio Holder, including a brief update on the budget out turn for the first quarter of 2017/18. He also referred to an external contractor's report on proposed changes to ICT.

CHAIRMAN