

28 JULY 2020

NEW FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

Minutes of a meeting of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Panel held on Tuesday, 28 July 2020

- * Cllr Alexis McEvoy (Chairman)
- * Cllr Alan Alvey (Vice-Chairman)

Councillors:

- * Fran Carpenter
- * Keith Craze
- * Sandra Delemare
- * Mahmoud Kangarani

Councillors:

- * Martyn Levitt
- * Alan O'Sullivan
- Beverley Thorne
- * Derek Tipp

*Present

In attendance:

Councillors:

Michael Harris

Also In Attendance

Glenn Peacey, Programme Manager, Superfast Broadband, Hampshire County Council

Officers Attending:

Andy Rogers and Claire Upton-Brown

Apologies

52 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

53 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

No issues were raised during the public participation period.

54 BROADBAND PROVISION IN THE NEW FOREST

The Panel received an update on the provision of broadband in New Forest District, together with a presentation by Glenn Peacey, Programme Manager for Hampshire Superfast Broadband, HCC.

An update was given to paragraph 5.1 of the report, noting that Government funding for full fibre connections, available through the Rural Gigabit Voucher

Scheme (RGVS), had recently been increased from £1500 to £3000 per residential premises.

Mr Peacey explained that the Super Fast Broadband Programme had been going since 2013, with the first tranche of Government funding of £10m followed by a further £18m, a significant part of which had been allocated to the New Forest. This had enabled 24,768 properties to receive upgrades with connections of speeds up to 24mbps.

In addition, approximately 1100 now had full fibre connections.

Mr Peacey explained the particular difficulties of working in the area, within the National Park, and the relationship between BT Openreach, Forestry England and Natural England. He had already approached NFDC seeking assistance in negotiating with these stakeholders to progress the remainder of the 1000 properties in plan.

He reported Ofcom figures indicated that 6700 properties in the District were still at less than 30mbps out of 86,900 properties. The main programme was drawing to a close, and the next programme for 2025 was not due to start until 2022, due to delays resulting from Covid.

Mr Peacey also referred to the RGVS and HCC's supplement of £1m of funding to increase the £1500 for residential properties to £3000 per property. It was hoped this would assist with community based broadband projects. Communications were being done with parish and district councils and county councillors.

Openreach had built considerable infrastructure and 96% of the County had now been reached, with the voucher scheme intended to top up the remaining 4%.

The point was made that although some figures showed 'available' speeds, these were not always those that customers chose to buy.

Local Plan requirements for broadband provision for new build was for the market to address, provided that the developers met certain requirements. Openreach would offer for free, full fibre broadband to any new development with at least 20 properties. Under this amount, and charges would apply, depending on local conditions. In respect of the infrastructure delivery plan, District officers had consulted HCC officers in terms of forecasting future requirements within the local plan. There was a requirement for every new dwelling under the new local plan to have a broadband connection which was discussed with developers.

It was noted 5G would be available fairly soon in towns though would require more aerials to provide a service. Satellite broadband had a role, and was a good service but it was very expensive. 4G was available as an alternative to a fixed connection.

The portfolio holder proposed that representations be made with the Department of Culture Media and Sport, and Broadband Delivery UK to continue momentum. Further partnership work was required in the District to push provision forward. Full fibre broadband required less of an impact on the local area, which was a particular consideration in environmentally sensitive areas, where permitted development rights did not always apply. There were a number of statutory bodies to negotiate with in achieving the best result, and further discussion was required to address the situation. There were also habitat projects ongoing which could potentially help achieve the necessary infrastructure in a sensitive way.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

CHAIRMAN