

UPDATE ON NEW FOREST BROADBAND PROVISION

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report provides an update to the Hampshire Broadband Programme and supports the presentation to be given by Hampshire County Council and BT at the meeting. It follows the previous update to Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Panel given in May 2017.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Hampshire County Council are currently working on Wave 2 of the Hampshire Superfast Broadband project which aims to reach 97% of premises across the county as a whole. This phase of the project is scheduled to be completed at the end of 2019.
- 2.2 Superfast connections are classified as those which are obtaining a minimum download speed of 24Mbps.
- 2.3 The current Universal Service Obligation (USO) states that the minimum download speed any premises should receive is 2Mbps.

3. COVERAGE IN THE NEW FOREST

- 3.1 Figures from September 2018 (see Appendix 2) show that 93.5% of New Forest premises are receiving superfast download broadband speeds. This compares against 96.2% for England and 95.0% for Hampshire.
- 3.2 Premises receiving under 2Mbps download speeds (the current USO) represent 0.97% of the New Forest total; compared to 0.64% for Hampshire and 0.43% for England.
- 3.3 Take-up of enabled broadband (the percentage of premises purchasing broadband services) in the New Forest varies significantly from ward to ward. Marchwood has the highest proportion of take-up at 81.1% followed up Forest North West (73.1%) and Ringwood and Sopley (70.3%). Those with the lowest proportion of take-up are Ringwood North (22.2%) and Hythe West and Langdown (23.5%). The average for New Forest District is 47.2% compared against the Hampshire average of 46.2%. These take-up figures are significant as the greater the proportion of premises connected, the more funds are available for further coverage. This is referred to as Gainshare.
- 3.4 The majority of New Forest District is served by traditional phone line broadband only. However, Virgin provide a cable service in Totton and more recently New Milton which can allow for speeds of up to 300Mbps to be delivered.

4. POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS

- 4.1 Premises falling under the 2Mbps minimum are eligible to apply for a £350 Better Basic Broadband subsidy to install and set up a satellite or fixed wireless solution. Applications for eligible properties can be made via the Hampshire Superfast Broadband Team at Hampshire County Council.

- 4.2 In June 2017, Hampshire County Council launched the £1M Community Match Funding Scheme (CMFS) to assist residents and communities who are not in current build programme (under the Wave 2 rollout). This scheme allows individual communities in the final 2.6% to effectively buy into the County Council's rollout programme with Openreach and to access an upgrade for their premises. The County Council will provide 50% funding towards the cost of an Openreach solution with a ceiling of £1,650 per property, costs beyond this must be met by the premises owner.
- 4.3 The Gigabit Voucher Scheme is designed to give businesses and surrounding communities access to gigabit connectivity; that of up to 1000Mbs. The voucher scheme allows businesses to claim up to £3000 against the cost of a gigabit connection. Residents can claim for a voucher worth £500 as part of a group which must include at least one business.
- 4.4 BT Openreach operate a scheme of Self-funding which allows communities failing in the final 3% to privately fund their own scheme. This requires individual communities to enter into direct contracts with BT Openreach. This model has been successfully implemented in the Dock Lane area of Beaulieu where 40 premises were connected with the cost spread.

5. FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

- 5.1 There are plans to increase the USO to 10Mbs by 2020. Beyond this there are plans to provide fibre to the premises (FTTP) for all by 2033.

6. CONCLUSIONS

- 6.1 It is recognised that broadband is an increasingly important element of everyday life and vital to the success of the local economy. With regard to the latter, it is recognised that in particular this impacts on the growth of indigenous businesses but also those who wish to work from home with the ambition of reducing their daily commute. For this reason it is highlighted as an action in the recently approved NFDC Economic Development Strategy 2018-23
- 6.2 Despite the various measures outlined in Section 4 of this report, there are will remain a number of premises in New Forest District who are not connected to superfast speeds at the end of the current Wave 2 rollout. It is estimated that this is likely to be in the region of 3000 premises.

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 There are no financial implications for New Forest District Council under the current Broadband Programme.

8. CRIME & DISORDER, ENVIRONMENTAL & EQUALITY & DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 There are none

9. DATA PROTECTION IMPLICATIONS

9.1 There are none

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 10.1 That members of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Panel note the contents of this report
- 10.2 That New Forest District Council continue to work with the Hampshire County Council Broadband Team, BT Openreach and other influential partners to further implement the rollout of covering in New Forest District.
- 10.3 That existing initiatives by way of grants and/or schemes to further broadband coverage are communicated to the residents and businesses of New Forest District to ensure the greatest possible take-up. Furthermore that where superfast is enabled, take-up of these services is promoted to ensure that the maximum Gainshare is enabled.

For further information contact:

Matt Callaghan
Economic Development Manager
023 8028 5588
matt.callaghan@nfdc.gov.uk

Background Papers:

Appendix 1: Hampshire County Council Cabinet Report – December 2017. Providing update on Superfast Broadband in Hampshire
Appendix 2: Summary of local broadband speeds / coverage – September 2018
Appendix 3: Table of feedback from local residents/businesses of broadband service and related map