



31 March 2015

Agenda Item: 4

**REPORT OF THE CHAIRMAN OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE
BROADBAND PETITIONS**

Purpose of the Report

1. The purpose of this report is to propose a response from Economic Development Committee to two petitions regarding broadband services in the villages of Fiskerton-cum-Morton and Thorpe, which were presented to Full Council on 26 February 2015.

(A) Petition regarding broadband services in Thorpe (Ref:2014/0111)

2. A petition of 46 signatures, organised by Thorpe residents was presented demanding that the Council acts immediately to ensure Thorpe is included in Contract 2 to ensure the villages businesses and residents have access to high speed internet provision in the same timescale as that of surrounding villages and in line with the stated aims of the Government to bring broadband to rural communities.

(B) Petition regarding broadband services in Fiskerton-cum-Morton (Ref:2014/0112)

3. A petition of 221 signatures, organised by Fiskerton-cum-Morton residents, was presented calling on the Council to provide high speed fibre optic broadband to Fiskerton-cum-Morton under round 2 of Better Broadband for Nottinghamshire.

Information and Advice

4. The existing Better Broadband for Nottinghamshire (BBfN) programme is well on track to delivering its ambitions to provide close to 95% of premises in the county (when combined with planned commercial coverage) with access to superfast broadband (24Mbps and above) by 2016 and 100% coverage of basic broadband (at least 2Mbps) by the end of 2015.
5. For the current contract, known as Contract 1, the County Council has undertaken a rigorous procurement process under the Government's Broadband Infrastructure Framework. This required bidders to ensure that the £10.5m public funding (and any additional private sector investment) would provide access to Superfast Broadband to as many premises as possible i.e. providing the most economical engineered solution so as many people as possible in Nottinghamshire could benefit. The County Council did not set any geographical priorities in Contract 1 to influence the development of bidder's roll out plans as this would have increased costs resulting in fewer people benefiting as coverage would be reduced.

6. Nottinghamshire County Council is the lead Authority for the programme in Nottinghamshire but improved broadband speeds are not something which the Council has a statutory responsibility for. The Council has a responsibility to ensure that the money available under the programme is used to maximum effect and that the works undertaken: (a) supply a network capable of delivering superfast broadband speeds to the optimum number of properties and (b) is of high quality.
7. It is pleasing to note that both villages recognise the limitations around amending the existing contract and are seeking to ensure their inclusion under Contract 2.
8. However, it is important to restate the position on the existing Better Broadband for Nottinghamshire (BBfN) rollout. In Contract 1 a finite sum of money was made available to the programme. The contract we originally entered into with BT was for them to achieve maximum coverage across the County with the money available. The rollout plan BT produced and are working to, is to achieve exactly that. Maximum coverage with the money available. Clearly to ensure maximum coverage their rollout plan is based on several factors ranging from the cost of the civil engineering work required, as well as the number of properties passed. The input Nottinghamshire County Council have had is in designing a contract which required maximum coverage. BT as part of the contractual requirements are delivering that.
9. Delivery of fibre broadband to both Fiskerton and Thorpe is technically challenging, particularly within the confines of value for money and the restricted funding envelope.
10. In an attempt to equalise improved connectivity across the County, the Contract 2 Invitation to Tender made clear that coverage should be targeted on the three districts of Bassetlaw, Newark & Sherwood and Rushcliffe (all of whom receive well below the 95% Government UK coverage aspirations). As a secondary consideration, the per premise cost of providing fibre based broadband (value for money) has to remain an over-riding factor determining which premises would be provided with access to a better broadband network due to the constraints of the Government framework.
11. It is worth noting that should Contract 2 come to fruition, it is expected that by 2017/18 the Council and other partners' investment will have delivered to 11% of the county (from the starting point of 86% fibre coverage pre BBfN) meaning that 97% of the county will have access to a new fibre broadband network. However equally 3% of Nottinghamshire will remain not covered.
12. It is vitally important that both the Council and its partners focus on promoting the availability of the new network. If take-up across the contract exceeds 20%, a gain-share mechanism is activated which could see significant funds released back to the programme for investment in further fibre rollout. Encouraging those communities with access to take-up services therefore becomes all the more vital if the Council and its partners want to close the gap for those communities unfortunately not covered by existing investment proposals.
13. Nevertheless, all Nottinghamshire local authorities, a range of partners and the Government want to extend coverage as far as possible. In fact, Government are currently working with suppliers to see how this can be achieved through a series of pilot projects. The projects are testing technology, financial and operating models capable of delivering superfast

broadband to the hardest to reach parts of the UK. Through the pilots, Government are generating evidence about:

- the cost of delivering in hard to reach areas
- levels of take-up of different technologies
- performance and customer experience of services provided.

14. Government also hope to build capacity and capability in the supplier market by sharing lessons learned from the projects. Initial learnings from the pilot projects are available in the *BDUK Market Test Pilots: Summary of initial findings from the feasibility phase document* (see background documents).
15. For the avoidance of doubt, the villages of Fiskerton-cum-Morton and Thorpe lie within the intervention area for the BBfN programme and therefore are both eligible to benefit.
16. Improving access to faster broadband is a key priority of the N2 Economic Prosperity Committee and it is expected, therefore, that it will also be a priority for the Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Combined Authority when the latter is formed. The County Council will ensure that both of these groups continue to lobby the Government for further investment in broadband infrastructure to address the issues faced by the 3% of premises that will not be covered by contracts 1 or 2.

Reason/s for Recommendation/s

17. It is a requirement of the Council that petitions presented to Council are considered by the relevant Committee(s) and that a response to the lead petitioners is discussed and prepared accordingly.

Statutory and Policy Implications

18. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of crime and disorder, finance, human resources, human rights, the NHS Constitution (Public Health only), the public sector equality duty, safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults, service users, sustainability and the environment and ways of working and where such implications are material they are described within the report.

Financial Implications

19. There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

RECOMMENDATION/S

20. That the Economic Development Committee:
- a. notes the receipt of the petitions
 - b. requests the Broadband Team responds to the lead petitioners for Fiskerton-Cum-Morton and Thorpe:

- notifying them that their concerns are acknowledged and that the County Council will continue to work towards maximum connectivity with the confines of the current contract and financial envelope.
- informing them that the County Council and its partners will do all they can to encourage the take-up of superfast services in an attempt to activate the contractual gain-share mechanism to allow the County Council to continue to press for maximum connectivity.

Report of the Chairman of Economic Development Committee

For any enquiries about this report please contact: Nicola M^cCoy-Brown, 72580

Constitutional Comments [CEH 18.03.15]

The Economic Development Committee has the delegated authority to consider the petitions. A report back to Council on the outcome of the consideration should be made to the next meeting of Council.

Financial Comments [SES 18/03/15]

There are no specific financial implications arising directly from this report.

Background Papers and Published Documents

- [Better Broadband for Nottinghamshire Contract 2](#) – report to Policy Committee, 07-01-2015
- *BDUK Market Test Pilots: Summary of initial findings from the feasibility phase document*, 09-02-2015 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/superfast-broadband-programme-phase-3>

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

Newark & Sherwood District, Councillor Sue Saddington