Chorley Council

MINUTES OF	**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY TASK GROUP - ROLLOUT OF SUPERFAST BROADBAND BY BT**
MEETING DATE	**Wednesday, 22 March 2017**
MEMBERS PRESENT:	Councillor Kim Snape (Chair) and Councillors Gordon France, Matthew Lynch, June Molyneaux, Alistair Morwood and Mark Perks
OFFICERS:	Chris Sinnott (Director (Policy and Governance)), Ruth Rimmington (Democratic and Member Services Officer), Gemma Johnson (Project Manager, Lancashire Superfast Broadband) and Nick Kershaw (Project Officer, Lancashire Superfast Broadband)
APOLOGIES:	Councillor John Dalton

17.SFB.1 Appointment of Chairperson

It was proposed and seconded that Councillor Kim Snape be appointed as Chairperson.

17.SFB.2 Apologies for absence

Councillor John Dalton.

17.SFB.3 Declarations of Any Interests

No declarations of any interests were received.

17.SFB.4 Scoping document

Members considered the scope of the inquiry and noted that it was envisaged that the inquiry would make its recommendations before the end of the municipal year.

An additional desired outcome was discussed: To make recommendations in line with the Council's Digital Strategy.

Decision: The scoping document be noted and updated with the additional desired outcome.

17.SFB.5 Superfast Broadband Rollout

Gemma Johnson, Project Manager and Nick Kershaw, Project Officer from Lancashire Superfast Broadband delivered a presentation.

Superfast Lancashire was collaboration between Lancashire County Council (LCC), British Telecom (BT), Broadband Delivery UK (BDUK) and Blackburn with Darwen and Blackpool Councils.

LCC had secured around £37 million of Public Sector Investment to intervene in 'white' areas (in additional to commercial rollout). A 'white' area was defined as having minimal coverage and open market review failure.

Contract One of the Superfast Lancashire programme consisted of 21% of the fibre rollout. 67% was BT/Openreach commercial fibre rollout and 9% was other operators' high speed broadband services. This left 3% remaining.

Contract 2, referred to as the Superfast Extension Programme (SEP) would deliver a further 2% to achieve 99% coverage, leaving 1%. This final 1% would be addressed through future plans such as Gainshare Advance, and only when demand was identified.

There were main three types of technology used by BT:
1.   Copper ADSL & ADSL2+ - Up to 20Mbps downstream and up to 2Mbps upstream.
2.   FTTC (Fibre to the Cabinet) - Up to 80Mbps downstream and up to 20Mbps upstream.
3.   FTTP (Fibre to the Premises) - Up to 330Mbps downstream and up to 30Mbps upstream

Superfast Lancashire enabled deployment to the final third of Lancashire that was not commercially viable for operators. By March 2016 it was planned that 97% of Lancashire homes and businesses would have access to broadband speeds above 24mbps, and 99% by March 2018. The 97% was achieved by June 2016. It was not cost effective to use public money to enable some rural areas.

In Phase One (Lancashire wide) 137,007 premises, 9,000+ eligible businesses (in the 'white' area) and 100+ business sites had access to Superfast Broadband. 454 Small Medium Enterprises (SMEs) had received business support related to the exploitation of Superfast Broadband access and 934 structures had been built and were providing service.

Work started in September 2016 on the Superfast Extension Project (SEP). There had been an additional £7.6m in external funding for this project which was expected to conclude by the end of December 2017. More than 11,000 extra homes would have access to fibre broadband through the project. The SEP would be more expensive as a result of delivery in the hardest to reach areas involving more build and use of Fibre to the Premise (FTTP).

These hardest to reach areas would benefit from Gainshare Advance. This was revenue Lancashire County Council was entitled to from BT under the contract in relation to connections above 20%. The initial estimate had been £6 million, but modelling had been made in relation to £4m due to a value for money assessment, whereby the £2m remains unallocated at this time.

A consultation had recently been undertaken with providers to highlight areas still to be covered through commercial rollout. BT was modelling in white areas and LCC and BDUK would review this. BT would sell access to their network to other providers, where Virgin had a closed network.

A potential funding stream was the European Agricultural, Farming and Rural Development Fund (EAFRD). This was £400,000k to be procured in 2017, if it was still available. The focus would be on support to local communities and rural businesses.

Specifically for Chorley, by December 2018 up to 97.5% of Chorley would benefit from Superfast Broadband coverage through further rollouts. This was a 3.8% increase from the 93.7% of Chorley covered by Superfast Broadband after Phase One.

In Phase One 2,748 postcodes in Chorley were identified in 2013 (equalling 49,679 premises. 18,363 were classified as 'white' and eligible for public funding. 17,212 premises were able to receive superfast fibre broadband. This left 1,151 premises.

Under current future build plans 703 white premises would be eligible through SEP and Gainshare, which left 448 premises.

LCC would review technologies, costs and consider funding options:

1. External Funding
2. Better Broadband Scheme: Subsidised broadband installation for businesses that could not access an affordable broadband service with a speed of at least 2MB per second.
3. Gainshare Advance
4. BT's Community Fibre Partnerships: Local communities could work with BT to part fund initiatives that provided coverage.

BT had provided information specifically for Chorley which outlined that around 300 further premises were due to benefit through the Superfast Lancashire SEP programme, in Hoghton, Brinscall, Eccleston and Chorley.

Around 600 further premises were due to benefit through Openreach's Commercial programme, including new premises on Buckshaw Village, as well as two cabinets related to the Milestone Meadow area of Buckshaw and Foxglove Drive area of Whittle-le-Woods.

Less than four years after Superfast Lancashire deployment began, coverage in Chorley had significantly increased. In May 2013, coverage in Chorley lagged both the UK and Lancashire average at >30Mbps and overall fibre broadband. By February 2017, fibre coverage had increased by +35%, while >30Mbps had increased by almost 33%. Chorley was already ahead of the UK Government target of 95% of homes and business having access to >24Mbps by the end of December 2017.

Adoption of Fibre Broadband was high within Chorley, with an average of 41.3%. There were issues with residents being aware that an order needed to be placed with a service provider to upgrade and that residents need to regularly check for availability.

There was a need to ensure new developments had the infrastructure for Superfast broadband from the outset, and to lobby for broadband to have the same status as utilities.

Some residents, particularly older residents, would benefit from some training to get online. LCC had a Digital Inclusion Programme, part of which included free training sessions delivered in Libraries across the County.

There were issues with unreliable data, with residents being told by BT they could not have Superfast Broadband, when they actually could. Any cases should be referred to the Superfast Lancashire team for them to investigate via email: superfast@lancashire.gov.uk.

There was a website "Think Broadband" that members of the public could use to access speed test information. The Superfast Lancashire team were launching a revamped website "Superfast Lancashire" in April. There was currently a holding page available which provided access to the Better Broadband Scheme Application Form. The Internet Service Providers would offer packages with up-to speeds and Superfast Fibre Broadband was any speed in excess of 24mbps. Comparison sites such as https://www.uswitch.com/broadband/ provided such information.

There was a need to check how the connections in the structures were allocated to companies, as there was anecdotal evidence that it was not allocated on a first come first serve basis. There was a procedure in place that once a structure was nearly full to request BT to increase capacity.

Some businesses relied on having access to reliable broadband, for example, a pub using wireless devices to place food and drink orders.   Any cases should be referred to the Superfast Lancashire team for them to investigate.

There was potential for Chorley Council to consider taking responsibility for laying cables within the Town Centre to progress the Digital Strategy / Town Centre Masterplan. Superfast Lancashire was meeting with District Councils to discuss their needs to facilitate a co-ordinated approach with Network providers where possible.

It would be helpful to provide hints and tips on resolving broadband issues, including residents speaking to their own provider first before speaking to other providers and not placing electrical devices next to the router etc. This information could then be distributed to Councillors and Town/Parish Councils.

It would be useful to receive further information about the different "alternative" technologies available to provide Superfast Broadband to white areas.

There had been marketing initially by BT, in schools and on structures. LCC had recently taken over the website and this would be going live shortly.

It was confirmed that the budget for the Superfast Lancashire project was not affected by the LCC budget cuts, as the funding was leverage to secure external funding.

Action points for the Superfast team
1. The take up in South West ward was unusually high in comparison to other areas?
2. To check the coverage in Lower Wheelton and Heapey.
3. To check how connections in the structures are allocated to companies: is it first come first served?
4. Information about the European Agricultural, Farming and Rural Development Fund (EAFRD) funding.

Questions for BT
1. Please could you give us some more information about the different technologies available to provide Superfast Broadband to white areas?
2. There is mention of Community Fibre Partnerships in the presentation we saw – please could you give us some more information about this?
3. The presentation states that new premises on Buckshaw Village and the Milestone Meadow area will benefit from the Commercial programme – please could you give a timescale for this to be operational?

17.SFB.6 Potential recommendations

Potential recommendations for Superfast Lancashire
1. To have discussions with Virgin about the current issues in Buckshaw, Rivington and White Coppice and encourage them to provide Superfast.
2. To highlight the issues of new estates not having Superfast from the outset with Broadband Delivery UK (BDUK).
3. To provide hints and tips on resolving broadband issues, including residents speaking to their own provider first before speaking to other providers and not placing electrical devices next to the router etc for distribution to Councillors and Town/Parish Councils.
4. To utilise different technologies available to provide Superfast Broadband to white areas.

Potential recommendations for BT
To update the call centre operative information in regard to Superfast Broadband accessibility, particularly around Wheelton, to avoid no further distress to residents who enquire going forward.

Potential recommendations for Chorley Council
1. To consider methods of encouraging new properties to have access to Superfast from the outset.
2. To liaise with BT about new developments, both residential and commercial.
3. To lobby Broadband Delivery UK (BDUK) to give broadband the same status as utilities.
4. To raise awareness with the public:
   • That the service would not upgrade automatically – there was a need to order Superfast broadband from their provider.
   • That residents should only be charged for the speed they actually receive.
5. To support the Council's ongoing program of training for older residents on the Borough on the use of technology and the internet.
6. To consider the Council taking over the laying of cables within the town centre to facilitate town centre Wi-Fi in the line with the Digital Strategy / Town Centre Masterplan.

7.	To work with the Combined Authority through the Digital Lancashire project to implement these recommendations.

Chair   Date