

Minutes

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

21st September 2016



Present

Councillors	Present	Councillors	Present
Mrs M Cunningham	Yes	R Ramage	Yes
J Goodman	Apologies	F Ricci	Yes
P Horner	Yes	Miss V Santomauro	No
D Hufton-Rees	No	P Schwier	Yes
G Maclure	Apologies	C Siddall (Chairman)	Apologies
D Mann (Vice-Chairman)	Yes	Vacancy	

Councillor Mrs I Parker, Chairman of the Task and Finish Group - Bus Services and Community Transport, and Councillor Mrs L Walters (until 7.40pm) were also in attendance.

23 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

INFORMATION: The following interest was declared:-

Councillor P Schwier declared a non-pecuniary interest in Agenda Item 5 – ‘Third Evidence Gathering Session for the Committee’s Scrutiny Review into Broadband Provision’ as a customer of both County Broadband and British Telecom (BT).

In accordance with the Code of Conduct, Councillor Schwier remained in the meeting and took part in the debate and decision when the Item was considered.

24 **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

INFORMATION: There were no questions asked, or statements made.

25 **MINUTES**

DECISION: That the Minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 24th August 2016 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

26 **THIRD EVIDENCE GATHERING SESSION FOR THE COMMITTEE’S SCRUTINY REVIEW INTO BROADBAND PROVISION**

INFORMATION: This meeting was the third evidence gathering session of the work programme for the Scrutiny Review into broadband provision in the Braintree District.

The theme of the session was to provide Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee with a comprehensive overview of the services offered by a number of broadband providers and the ways in which the Braintree District could benefit from these.

The following invitees had kindly agreed to participate in this session of the Scrutiny Review and they attended the meeting to present information and to answer Members' questions:-

Mr Lloyd Felton, Managing Director, County Broadband

County Broadband was a 'Wireless Internet Service Provider' (WISP) with over 10 years' experience. County Broadband worked in partnership with a range of Parish Councils, local churches and the community as a whole to provide broadband networks and services in difficult to reach places, especially rural areas.

Mr Joe Frost, Business Development Director, Gigaclear plc

Gigaclear plc built and operated fibre broadband networks in rural communities and had around 19 live rural networks with more than 23 under construction. Gigaclear plc had been selected to deliver the rural challenge pilot project in Epping Forest as part of the Superfast Essex Programme.

Mr Giles Ellerton, Regional Partnership Director, British Telecom (BT)

BT was the UK's major provider of telecommunication networks and services and it was responsible for delivering phases 1 and 2 of the BDUK funded Superfast Essex programme. BT worked with local communities to set up co-funded community fibre partnership projects in hard to reach rural communities.

Members of the Committee received presentations from the invitees, which may be viewed on the Council's website at:

<http://braintree.cmis.uk.com/braintree/Meetings/tabid/70/ctl/ViewMeetingPublic/mid/397/Meeting/568/Committee/4/Default.aspx>

The following points were made by Mr Lloyd Felton, Managing Director, County Broadband in his presentation to the Committee:

- County Broadband is a local company and employer in its fourteenth year of operation.
- The company provides a broadband service to over 130 villages in Essex and Suffolk
- Full projects are run from beginning to end.
- An IPV6 compliant network is provided.
- Colchester Borough Council has selected County Broadband as a technical partner.
- The Diocese of Chelmsford has invested in County Broadband.
- The company has received approximately £60,000 from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs' - Rural Development Programme, but otherwise the company is privately funded.
- NGA compliance is very important. The Department for Culture, Media and Sport has confirmed that the County Broadband network meets the standard. The company is currently working through another compliance process.
- Understanding the drivers. Is FAST, fast enough? Low-cost telephony (VoIP) uses almost no data. Unlimited use of multiple devices.

- There is a need to look further forward as to how the digital future will shape and change eg. television - 4k TV, 8k TV and 3D holographic TV. All will be 'data hungry'.
- In the future there will be a number of applications and uses that are not yet known, which will require even more infrastructure.
- The technology options available are:- copper; fibre to the cabinet (FTTC); G-Fast FTTC; satellite; wireless; hybrid fibre to the air (FTTA/wireless); fibre to the home (FTTH) (GPON and Point to Point)
- Copper. The problems with copper include that broadband doesn't like travelling down copper wire; it loses speed rapidly; the service is asymmetrical which means that there may be a fast down-load speed, but the up-load speed may be significantly reduced. This is relevant to 'cloud' technology as information on devices is now copied up as well as down. The technology has been in the ground for 50 plus years, some has degraded quite badly and some has gone missing.
- ADSL Copper. An example of copper deployment as it used to be - from the exchange to a cabinet in the street and from the cabinet to the home and the disadvantages of this provision (eg. attenuation problems; maximum speed 24Mbps; asymmetrical service; 50 plus year old copper lines).
- FTTC Fibre and Copper. An example of what is now being deployed – fibre from the exchange to a cabinet in the street only and the disadvantages of this provision (eg. not fibre broadband; attenuation problems; maximum speed 80Mbps; asymmetrical service; 50 plus year old copper lines).
- G-Fast Fibre and Copper. This boosts the signal across the copper. The disadvantages of this provision (eg. requires electricity to the cabinet in the street and to each telegraph pole; there is interference due to amplification; speed is slower over distance/attenuation after just 300 yards; asymmetrical service; still using old technology).
- Satellite. This is a great solution as it is remote, it does not rely on any infrastructure and it is universally available. The disadvantages of this provision (eg. that it is latent and subject to jitters which means that it is not a good form of technology where 'real time', or the quick transfer of data between devices is required; it is not known what the cost of the service will be once the initial subsidised period of provision has passed).
- FTTA Fibre and Wireless. This is the service which County Broadband mainly provides. It is similar to FTTC and involves taking fibre from the exchange to a mast from which a connection is made wirelessly. This service does not require copper, the distribution speeds are significantly higher over distance and it is a symmetrical service which provides the same up-load and down-load speeds. Minimal civil works are required and the service can be deployed rapidly. The disadvantages of this provision (eg. the number of devices being managed and a higher maintenance requirement).
- FTTH. This is the fibre to the home option which provides an infinite service in terms of speed. The disadvantages of this provision (eg. the civil works required are significant and the cost of provision). County Broadband is currently delivering its first major fibre to the home project which will be followed by two more privately funded projects.
- FTTA provision by County Broadband. This is particularly relevant to the most rural parts of the Braintree District. Fibre is provided from the exchange to masts to create a wireless ring from which connections are made to key hub points within a community which transmit to individual properties.
- County Broadband has already deployed a number of masts/host building points across Essex and more points are proposed which will provide significant coverage across the County including to 18 villages within the Braintree District.
- Wireless technology is currently in its fourth generation and equipment is capable of providing 100Mbps through symmetric services
- It is not known what the fifth generation will be, but County Broadband ensures that its networks are continually upgraded and that the cost of regeneration is accounted for.

- Point to point up to 10Gbps (80GHz) wireless connectivity is now available, which can provide a substantial amount of data.
- Building an FTTH network within an Essex village. Design work on FTTH provision is taking place to implement when required. The civil works required are quite significant.
- Balancing Topology with Capacity. 90%-95% 'wired Superfast FTTC' coverage is provided across the United Kingdom, but only 30% of the land mass is within rural areas.
- 5G new technology will require more than ten times as many full tower sites. The 3G and 4G technology currently accounts for 5% of traffic, with Wi-Fi handling 45%-50% of traffic by default. In future, it is considered that the key will be to run fibre to the mast and to increase the depth of fibre penetration to the home.
- Can 'Alternative Networks' compete in terms of entertainment? It is considered that they can in respect of pricing and services. Many companies are offering VoIP technology and Sky, Netflix and TalkTalk are already providing subscription services over IP. IP is a 'common standard'. In the future, content should not be linked to the Network provider.

The following points were made by Mr Joe Frost, Business Development Director, Gigaclear plc in his presentation to the Committee:

- Gigaclear plc is a five year old company based in Oxfordshire. The company is privately funded and has some significant investors.
- The company works in rural areas to deliver purely fibre networks - either FTTP fibre to premises, or FTTH fibre to the home. These are the most expensive networks to deploy as it is necessary to dig a hole to each property in a village which is to be connected.
- Gigaclear plc has two business models:-
 - Commercial – This is currently being rolled-out on the Western side of Essex to approximately 4,500 to 5,000 properties and funded via company investors.
 - BDUK – This involves submitting a bid to the Government for a subsidy and involves working very closely with the Superfast Essex Team. Under the BDUK scheme, the Government and local District Councils are part funding the build of new network infrastructure.
- It is anticipated that Gigaclear plc will have connected approximately 45,000 properties to fibre by the end of 2016 and it is currently working in 18 counties across the country.
- In Essex, Gigaclear plc has been awarded the Superfast Essex Rural Challenge Project to provide fibre connectivity across most of the District of Epping Forest. It is anticipated that this project will be completed by Spring/Summer 2017 and that it will provide fibre to about 4,500 premises. The project involves an investment of £2 million shared equally between Essex County Council and BDUK and an investment of approximately £6 million by Gigaclear plc. The project has encouraged Gigaclear plc to consider possible schemes for other parts of Essex.
- Superfast Essex will be reviewing which parts of Essex do not have a superfast broadband service and they will be launching a public procurement exercise later in the year in order to appoint a supplier. Gigaclear plc is considering becoming involved in this process.
- Gigaclear plc provides fibre to premises networks. Whilst these are expensive to deploy, they require little maintenance; they will last for many years; and there is virtually no limit to the speed at which data may be transmitted. This capacity provides many advantages for customers and users and it will also enable other uses and services in the future such as 'tele-medicine' and 'real time' communication.
- The provision of ultra-fast broadband helps to transform lives in rural areas, particularly in terms of economic development. Examples given of four companies located in rural parts of Oxfordshire which have been able to expand and to broaden their markets following the installation of ultra-fast broadband.

The following points were made by Mr Giles Ellerton, Regional Partnership Director, British Telecom (BT) in his presentation to the Committee:

- Mr Ellerton started his presentation by reporting that he had spent the day visiting the BT Laboratory Industrial Park based near Ipswich, Suffolk. This is a global research and innovation centre which has been operating for over 40 years. Current innovations mean that speeds of up to 5.8Mbps can be achieved over a copper pair. This means that BT will be able to continue to use both fibre and copper networks for the foreseeable future. This has been possible due to signal processing and being able to use optics to push a signal further down the existing copper network. BT has been deploying two key solutions. One is the provision of fibre to a cabinet and the other is the provision of fibre to a premises. Fibre to a cabinet provides a speed of up to 8Mbps for down-loading and fibre to a premises typically provides up to 300Mbps. BT is currently deploying approximately 200,000 FTTP premises across the United Kingdom and the ambition over the next few years is to increase that to two million properties. With regard to FTTC, BT has deployed a service to 25 million premises to date.

- Mr Ellerton explained that the main purpose of his presentation was to provide information about BT's 'Community Fibre Partnerships' which sought to help communities which are not able to receive fibre broadband either commercially from a provider, or from one of the contracts let by Superfast Essex. It is the Government's aim to extend access to superfast broadband to all homes and businesses in the United Kingdom by 2020.

- 'Community Fibre Partnerships' enable BT to provide a broadband service to communities by offering them the opportunity to co-invest directly with BT. BT will assist in providing a broadband solution to a community by investing in new infrastructure to a value that is commercially viable. The community is expected to fund the difference between BT's contribution and the overall cost of the scheme. This arrangement has been in operation for about four years and contracts have been entered into with approximately 100 communities across the United Kingdom. Nationally, discussions are on-going with approximately 1700 communities regarding the options available and approximately 60 of these communities are in Essex. This is a large programme and it has a dedicated Team to support it.

- The process requires a community to register with the BT 'Community Fibre Partnerships' Team which then provides the community with a quotation for a 'gap fund'. A 'gap fund' is the difference between the commercially viable funds which BT Openreach is prepared to invest and the amount required to deploy an FTTC, or FTTP solution. If the community is able to confirm that it can raise the funds required for the 'gap fund', BT provides a formal, contractual quotation. Once agreed, the solution is deployed by BT typically within 12 months of the contract being signed.

- BT is able to assist a community with the Partnership process in terms of marketing, crowd-funding and the formation of a legal entity on which to contract. This makes it as easy as possible for the community to find a solution.

- There are a number of ways to ease the burden of the 'gap fund' to the community. These include a voucher scheme of up to £350 per premises, which is available to premises that currently receive a down-load speed of less than 2Mbps.

BT has also created a £2 million fund from which it can draw down up to £20,000 to match-fund any local contribution in those communities where there is a school which does not have access to fibre.

A process has been established by BT to enable a Local Authority to match-fund a community's contribution in order that a Community Partnership contract may go forward. Crowd-Funding. BT works in partnership with a company called Spacehive which helps communities to engage with each household in the community in order to raise funds.

- Once a 'Community Fibre Partnerships' scheme has been delivered, BT will continue to maintain and upgrade the infrastructure going forward.
- G-Fast. This is 'bolt-on' technology whereby BT adds new equipment to an existing fibre cabinet. This technology will be deployed to 10 million homes across the United Kingdom by 2020. This will provide households with a speed of between 300 – 500Mbps.

Following the presentations, the invitees answered Members' questions.

The Chairman thanked the invitees for their attendance and he expressed his gratitude for their contributions to the Scrutiny Review.

27 **ANNUAL REPORT OF THE BRAINTREE DISTRICT COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP 2015-16**

INFORMATION: Consideration was given to Braintree District Community Safety Partnership's Annual Report 2015-16 and Strategic Assessment January 2016.

Members of the Committee were advised that the Braintree District Community Safety Partnership (CSP) included representatives of Braintree District Council, Essex Police, Essex Fire and Rescue Service, NHS Mid-Essex Clinical Commissioning Group, Essex Community Rehabilitation Company, Essex County Council Education (Primary and Secondary), Family Solutions, Braintree District Voluntary Support Agency and Greenfields Community Housing. The members of the CSP worked together to protect the local community from crime and to help people feel safer.

There was a statutory requirement for CSPs to carry out an annual Strategic Assessment. This Assessment collated and analysed statistical and contextual data from a range of partners and it was used to inform key findings and to recommend future priorities.

The priorities contained within the CSP's Action Plan for 2015/16 had been domestic abuse; sexual offences; and violent crime. Details of the key achievements during the year for each of these priorities were set out in the report. The priorities for 2016/17 were to reduce the risk and impact of hidden harm; to reduce re-offending; and to provide effective partnership working to meet emerging local threats and issues.

The Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) had allocated a sum of £20,158 to the CSP to deliver the Action Plan for 2016/17 and there was an opportunity to submit bids for funding from the OPCC Gangs' Fund and the Community Initiatives Fund. Funding bids could also be submitted to the Essex County Fire and Rescue Service for up to £5,000 per project.

It was reported that CSP partners attended a bi-weekly strategic Braintree Tactical Assessment meeting to discuss Essex Police high priority themes; emerging threats and trends; and hotspot areas. This provided a multi-agency response to dealing with emerging crime throughout the year. A hub was also being developed within Braintree District Council's offices to enable CSP partners to co-locate; deliver the priorities in the Action Plan; share information; and identify local needs.

DECISION: That the Braintree District Community Safety Partnership's Annual Report 2015-16 be noted and that no recommendations be made to Cabinet.

REASON FOR DECISION: To consider the Braintree District Community Safety Partnership's Annual Report 2015-16 and to highlight any issues for the Cabinet Member Environment and Place to consider.

28 **REPORT OF THE TASK AND FINISH GROUP - BUS SERVICES AND COMMUNITY TRANSPORT**

INFORMATION: Councillor Mrs I Parker, Chairman of the Task and Finish Group - Bus Services and Community Transport, presented the final report on the work of the Task and Finish Group. The Group had reviewed the provision of these services in the Braintree District as part of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's work programme for 2015/16. The Group had made eight recommendations following the review and these were set out in the report.

The Chairman thanked the Members of the Task and Finish Group for their work and he congratulated them on the clarity of the report and its recommendations.

DECISION: That the report of the Task and Finish Group - Bus Services and Community Transport be approved and the following eight recommendations contained within it be referred to Full Council on 17th October 2016 and Cabinet on 29th November 2016 for consideration:-

Demand Responsive Transport (DaRT)

This has replaced some Essex County Council subsidised bus routes including the Shopper Bus service. DaRT was introduced in parts of the Braintree District in April 2016.

We will need to see what impact this has on the District's Community Transport Scheme, particularly on the social car scheme in the DaRT 2 and 3 areas. Residents with a bus pass will be able to use this on the DaRT Transport, whereas the social car scheme costs the passenger 60p per mile. It may be that it will not be necessary to operate the social car scheme in these areas, although DaRT will not replace the service provided by the minibus hire scheme.

Recommendation 1

The Council should follow the implementation of the service in the District by attending relevant Essex County Council meetings. This is in order to understand how the service is operating in practice and to assess any possible impact on the Community Transport Service.

Total Transport Review for Essex and Suffolk

Recommendation 2

We need to follow this review which looks at services in rural areas and has a relevance to the Braintree District.

Community Transport

Community Transport helps meet the needs that are not met by conventional public transport. The service supports primarily older people and people with physical disabilities. It enables access to essential services such as health related appointments

and shopping, but also has a significant role in preventing social isolation by supporting people to visit friends and other social trips.

The service is dependent on annually determined grant support from Essex County Council and funding from Braintree District Council. Braintree District Council will undertake a review of the service in 2016/17 and financial aspects of the service will be included in the review. The fact that funding is only provided on an annual basis does make it difficult to plan over a longer term, in particular it makes it difficult to make investment decisions and bid for contracts. Funding for a two year period, or longer would be preferable.

There is a need for continued discussion with the NHS Mid-Essex Clinical Commissioning Group, community hospitals, GP surgeries, social prescribers and Citizens Advice to raise awareness of the Community Transport Service and there may be the potential for some direct services.

Volunteers are essential to this service and there is also an ongoing need to promote the need for volunteers.

The Community Transport Scheme can register and operate bus routes and this may sometimes be a possibility where a commercial route may no longer be viable. It may be possible to operate a limited service, although Braintree District Council will need to be confident that drivers are available to operate a service. If registered bus routes do not run there are both reputational risks and also fines to be paid.

Recommendation 3

There is a need to look at the issues regarding future funding of the District's Community Transport Scheme as part of the review of Community Transport in 2016/17. The review should consider whether it would be possible to provide funding for a period which is longer than one year.

Recommendation 4

There should be further engagement with health providers to raise awareness of the Community Transport Service and build ongoing relationships with the NHS Mid-Essex Clinical Commissioning Group, local GPs and social prescribers to enable the different services to work more closely together.

Recommendation 5

The Community Transport Service currently offers transport only one way to Broomfield Hospital or Colchester Hospital for outpatient appointments. It is recommended that the provision of a return journey either by using Community Transport or another provider should be thoroughly explored.

Recommendation 6

To review how the Community Transport Service is promoted to both potential users of the service and people who may be interested in volunteering. This should include the NHS Mid-Essex Clinical Commissioning Group, community hospitals, GP surgeries, social prescribers and Citizens Advice and should also include the possibility of advertising via social media. The review should bear in mind the need to balance demand for the service with the number of volunteers.

To look at internal resources to assist with the marketing and promotion of the Braintree District Community Transport Service.

Increased Awareness by Providers and Customers of the Range of Transport Services Available

This issue was raised in relation to a range of transport matters and it was recognised that it can be challenging to promote public transport particularly:-

Community Transport

Non-Emergency Hospital Transport

The Healthcare Travel Costs Scheme

The Pilot Parking Scheme at the Chelmer Valley Park and Ride

Recommendation 7

That the Council contacts the local hospitals, Clinical Commissioning Groups and Essex County Council to share this report with them and to look at ways of jointly promoting these services.

School Transport

We have identified the issue of transport for children of 16 plus who remain in education and transport costs having to be met by parents. It is now compulsory for children between 16 and 18 to remain in education or training.

Recommendation 8

That the Council notes this issue and asks Essex County Council whether they would consider providing free transport to school or college for this age group. If Essex County Council declines, that the Council writes to its local Members of Parliament on the provision of free transport to school or college for 16 to 18 year olds.

REASON FOR DECISION: To approve the report of the Task and Finish Group - Bus Services and Community Transport and to enable the report to be referred to Council and Cabinet.

29 **UPDATE ON TASK AND FINISH GROUPS**

INFORMATION: There was nothing to report under this Item.

30 **DECISION PLANNER**

DECISION: That the Decision Planner for the period 1st October 2016 to 31st January 2017 be noted.

The meeting commenced at 7.15pm and closed at 8.48pm.

Councillor D Mann
(Vice-Chairman in the Chair)