



CAI.41 13/14
Committee: Challenge and Improvement
Date: 18th March 2014

Subject: Mobile Accessibility Round Table Discussion

Report by:

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Purpose / Summary:

To report to Members the outcome of discussions relating to the Mobile Infrastructure Project

RECOMMENDATION(S):

- 1. That Members note the discussions have taken place.**
- 2. That Members acknowledge the recommendation made – Option 1 detailed within the report which in summary recommends that the current MIP project is the most appropriate solution in relation to improving mobile accessibility across the District.**

IMPLICATIONS

Legal: None

Financial : FIN/101/14: None

Staffing : None – Any subsequent planning applications will be processed from within existing staffing resources and skills sets.

Equality and Diversity including Human Rights :
NB: Please explain how you have considered the policy's impact on different groups (for example: young people, elderly, ethnic minorities, LGBT community, rural residents, disabled, others).

Risk Assessment : None

Climate Related Risks and Opportunities : None

Title and Location of any Background Papers used in the preparation of this report:

Call in and Urgency:

Is the decision one which Rule 14.7 of the Scrutiny Procedure Rules apply?

i.e. is the report exempt from being called in due to urgency (in consultation with C&I chairman)

Yes

No

X

Key Decision:

A matter which affects two or more wards, or has significant financial implications

Yes

No

X

1. Background

- 1.1. At the meeting of Council on 09 Sep 2013, (minute 58) - priorities were proposed and approved with the addition of a 10th priority around mobile connectivity. Challenge and Improvement Committee were subsequently asked to consider the evidence for this priority.
- 1.2. Initial work undertaken under this priority directed officers to the Mobile Infrastructure Project (MIP) being undertaken by two companies on behalf of the Department for Culture Media & Sport. This is a £150m infrastructure project funded through Central Government to assist rural areas by making improvements to mobile coverage. In order to facilitate this the MIP has been given target “not spots” (data provided by Ofcom).

2. Approach

- 2.1 A roundtable meeting was organised include both members and officers of WLDC along with representatives from the two companies. This meeting took place on Wednesday 18th December 2013.

3. Objectives

- 3.1. The objectives of the roundtable debate were proposed as:
 - To establish the current coverage/lack of coverage of mobile connectivity across the district
 - To establish likely improvements from mobile providers in the next few years for the District,
 - To establish options to increase mobile phone access in rural areas,
 - To understand what technical solutions may be available to us,
 - Provide a proposal for the way forward with regards to this priority.

4. Outcome

- 4.1. After a presentation on what function the two companies have in delivering the MIP it became clear that in general terms, one of the companies own the vast majority of mobile infrastructure sites, namely, the masts. They install the masts and the Mobile Operators will be responsible for operational costs thereafter.
- 4.2. Sites will only be brought to full planning application once it has been agreed that the site will in fact give coverage to one, or a number of not spots, that there is a viable transmission link, an economic power supply is secured and that site rental and construction remains economic. The site must also be accessible. Only after all these characteristics of the site have been satisfied will planning permission be sought.
- 4.3. It was confirmed that individual “not spots” identified by Ofcom were commercially sensitive and therefore could not be divulged. It is also important to understand that Ofcom’s definition of a “not spot” may be different to the way an individual would define it. For the purposes of the MIP a “not spot” is defined as follows: A 200m sided grid square where no

network coverage is available from any Mobile Network Operator (MNO). Due to the volume of not spots, the MIP will, in order to maximise the effectiveness of the funding, seek to address not spots that contain premises and/or stretches of key roads.

- 4.4. Discussions were then held over sharing masts with wireless broadband providers, and if this was viable. It was explained that in theory the technology shouldn't conflict, however, in reality, the lattice masts the company will use are designed specifically to carry the microwave transmitters for the mobile network and facilitating a shared mast would not happen.
- 4.5. The discussion then moved to the two mast sites identified by the MIP in their implementation plan and from a WLDC perspective no barriers to implementation could be seen other than standard planning approval.
- 4.6. The MIP is currently in Phase Four, which includes West Lindsey. Site surveys are to be undertaken in the very near future. Time scales cannot currently be laid out as progress is dependent on suitable sites being secured and planning permission granted. WLDC will be able to robustly monitor progress once consultation with our planning team begins.
- 4.7. After the meeting had concluded it was agreed that officers would monitor closely the progress of the West Lindsey masts to ensure they were installed as soon as possible. Once the new masts are installed, WLDC will gauge the effectiveness in terms of addressing not spots and decisions on any necessary further action should be taken at that point.

5. Options

- 5.1. Option 1: Do nothing. West Lindsey DC take no further action and allow the MIP to run its course. Engagement and monitoring in the project will come in the form of the usual planning process. This is the recommended option.
- 5.2. Option 2: WLDC Land. Officers have already assessed what land The Council owns with a view to offering this as an option. No land was found to be suitable in the relevant areas identified by Ofcom.
- 5.3. Option 3: WLDC install and operate one or more masts. Given the cost of suitable land acquisition as well as the cost to purchase, install and operate a mast, this is not thought to be feasible at the current time.

6. Recommendations to C&I Committee

- 6.1 That Members acknowledge the Mobile Infrastructure Project as the best current solution to lack of mobile phone coverage in the District and therefore support Option 1 above.