



**Committee: Prosperous  
Communities Committee**

**Date: 5<sup>th</sup> June 2018**

**Subject: West Lindsey District Broadband Availability Issues**

Report by:

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Purpose / Summary:

To:

- provide an update on broadband initiatives;
- highlight current issues affecting communities across the District;
- offer options open to the Council.

**RECOMMENDATION(S):**

- 1. For Members to consider the options set out at Section 4 of the report, and to direct officers which of these are to be investigated further.**

**Members are to receive an update at a later Committee.**

## IMPLICATIONS

**Legal: None**

**Financial: FIN-57-19-CC**

At this stage approval is being sought to research the options further, as such no financial implications have been identified for consideration. An additional report will be presented to committee with fully costed options to enable the appropriate decision to be taken at a later date.

**Staffing: None.**

**Equality and Diversity including Human Rights: None**

**Risk Assessment: None**

**Climate Related Risks and Opportunities: None**

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

**None.**

**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. Introduction**

- 1.1 Think Broadband report that as at May 2018, 95.2% of the UK receive superfast broadband (>24Mbps). However, for West Lindsey the figure falls to 87% (Nov 2016 – 85.4%; Oct 2017 – 86.74%). Slow progress is being made.
- 1.2 The most recent [Ofcom report](#) into broadband speeds (May 2018), found that in urban areas, 59% of connections delivered average speeds topping 30 Mbps over the 20:00-22:00 peak-time period meeting the watchdog's definition of "superfast", while 17% were under 10 Mbps. However, in rural areas, only 23% of connections surpassed 30 Mbps over the same hours, while 53% were under 10 Mbps.
- 1.3 As new waves of technology have come on stream, mobile connectivity and Broadband/internet speeds across the District have been an issue for a number of years. The size, topography and rural nature of the District have all combined to exacerbate the problems. On a regular basis the Council receives queries from residents on how they might access broadband or how their current broadband speeds could be increased.
- 1.4 To try and address the position a number of initiatives have been launched and projects have been established on both a regional and national basis. The Council has also surveyed residents on their experiences, worked with a regionally based provider, lobbied other service providers and assigned monies to the OnLincolnshire/BDUK programme. A number of reports have been provided for the Prosperous Communities Committee to advise of the Council's involvement in the topic and to provide wider contextual information.
- 1.5 It is a fast-moving, complex area. Over recent years many national initiatives have been announced. Presently there are a number of concurrent, overlapping initiatives in place and there are regular fresh announcements of new initiatives by Government and service providers alike. These relate to attempts to secure the provision of high speed broadband for those areas that are harder to reach (and by default more costly to support) and are yet to receive high speed broadband (defined by Ofcom as at least 10 Mbps.)

## **2. Current Initiatives**

- 2.1 A flavour of a number of current initiatives is set out below:

OnLincolnshire - Lincolnshire County Council has now signed an agreement with BT to enter into a third phase of the Lincolnshire Broadband Programme. The main phase, 'Phase 1' was successfully completed on 31st March 2016 and with 'Phase 2' completing by the end of 2017. Phase 3 is intended to provide faster broadband to over 9000 additional premises across the county, of which 97% will be in

areas designated 'Rural' or 'Very Rural'. This should include areas of West Lindsey that have yet to be connected to superfast broadband.

The timescale for Phase 3 is a start date of Autumn 2017 and a finish date of December 2019. These timescales align to Government aspirations as attempts are made to push Superfast broadband coverage up to 97% of the county.

However, to date the areas/postcodes within West Lindsey that are to be included in Phase 3 have not been published. On-going communication in regard to this matter is underway with the OnLincolnshire team.

Gigabit Broadband Voucher Scheme – This is part of the Local Full Fibre Networks Programme which has the strategic objective of increasing full fibre coverage across the UK. It is organised by DCMS with a total funding pot of £67m. It entails a grant contribution to pay towards upgrading business broadband to a high-speed capable connection. Gigabit vouchers can be used by small businesses and the local communities surrounding them to contribute to the installation cost of a gigabit capable connection. Businesses can claim up to £3,000 against the cost of connection either individually or as part of a group project. Residents can benefit from the scheme as part of a group project which also includes businesses, and can claim for a voucher of up to a value of £500.

Community Fibre Partnership – The initiative run by Openreach is designed to bring fibre broadband to homes and businesses by building a customised solution to meet needs. Where possible it brings together funding from local authorities, Government voucher schemes and other grants to help make things affordable. Openreach also contribute towards the cost within their commercial model.

5G Projects – In March 2018, the Government announced the winners of a £25m competition to pave the way for a future rollout of 5G technology in the UK. Six projects led by SMEs, universities and local authorities were successful with the aim to explore the benefits of 5G for rural communities, tourism and healthcare. With local interest, Quickline Communications were successful in being awarded a grant of £2.1m. Under the banner '5G Rural Integrated Testbed (5GRIT)' they will explore innovative use of 5G technology across a range of rural applications, such as smart agriculture, tourism and connecting poorly-served communities, using shared spectrum in the TV bands and a mix of local ISPs and self-provision.

Universal Service Obligation – Access to high speed broadband is to become a legal right delivered by a USO giving everyone access to speeds of at least 10Mbps by 2020. By 2020, it is anticipated that 98% of the UK will be able to order a fixed superfast (24Mbps+) broadband connection. The new USO will be primarily focused upon helping to cater for those in the final 2%; estimated to be somewhere around

300,000 to 500,000 premises. The Government has set out the design for a legal right to high speed broadband in secondary legislation enacted earlier this year as part of the [Digital Economy Act 2017](#). Anticipated benefits are:

- the minimum speed of connection can be increased over time as consumers' connectivity requirements evolve;
- it provides for greater enforcement to help ensure households and businesses do get connected
- the scheme will maximise the provision of fixed line connections in the hardest to reach areas.
- places a legal requirement for high speed broadband to be provided to anyone requesting it, subject to a cost threshold (in the same way the universal service right to a landline telephone works)

### **3. Known Issues Across the District**

- 3.1 A number of locations/settlements across the District currently suffer from issues related to broadband access. Examples include:

Spridlington – the nearest BT cabinet (three miles from the settlement) has been upgraded to fibre. However residents, when last contacted, reported broadband speeds as low as 0.6Mbps. Quickline have installed a transmitter in the village which relies on line of sight. However the topography and number of trees have seriously impacted on the expected quality of service.

Snitterby – similar issues to Spridlington due to distance from the BT cabinet. Residents suffer from drop-out of service and slow speeds.

Cherry Willingham – two recent housing developments in the village have not been supported with fibre broadband. Neither the developer nor BT are taking full responsibility. BT are in discussions with residents about their Community Fibre Partnership, but the raising of the required funds by the community affected is problematic. The developer is of the opinion that their obligations have been fully discharged on the sites and have moved on.

Owmy and around – residents are supplied by the Searby exchange, but no fibre or superfast provision is available. Hence speeds are extremely low. Wireless solutions are said to be available.

### **4. Potential Options Open to WLDC**

- 4.1 Running through all options set out below is the need to continue to lobby (Government, MPs, service providers, OnLincolnshire) on behalf of the District. Potential options open to the Council are:
- a) Fund developments across the District to fill the known gaps and improve access and speeds. However, in the current financial climate with severe pressure on budgets, the costs are unknown/unlimited and

it is not appropriate for the District Council to intervene and provide a universal service. This is a central government responsibility.

- b) Adopt a 'sign-posting' stance for communities/residents to provide over view information and point enquiries toward the various available funding streams and options.
- c) Employ, on a fixed term basis, a 'broadband community champion' to work closely with relevant communities to identify issues, options, funding streams, garner community support/awareness, liaise with service providers and keep abreast of developments in this field. One option may be that other Lincolnshire Councils in a similar position may be willing to resource a shared role. Further investigation of this possibility could be pursued.
- d) Rely on OnLincolnshire Phase Three to deliver on behalf of the District and allow other initiatives (both planned and future) to address the issue.