

Cabinet Member Meeting for Strategic Finance and Resources

13 October 2016

Name of Cabinet Member:

Cabinet Member for Strategic Finance and Resources – Councillor J Mutton

Director Approving Submission of the report:

Executive Director of Resources

Ward(s) affected:

Lower Stoke

Title:

Report in response to petitions regarding provision of superfast broadband in New Stoke Village

Is this a key decision?

No

Executive Summary:

Two petitions have been submitted to the City Council regarding the provision of Superfast broadband in New Stoke Village. The first petition sponsored by Councillor McNicholas, contains 26 signatures and was received on 31 March 2016. The second petition is an ePetition with 80 signatures and was received on 17 May 2016.

Both petitions request that the Council helps to improve the broadband speeds in New Stoke Village.

This report provides a response to the petitions and details actions being taken to address the issues highlighted.

Recommendations:

The Cabinet Member is recommended to:-

1. Respond to the petition organiser encouraging residents of New Stoke Village to register their requirements for access to superfast broadband with local broadband providers (BT and Virginmedia).
2. Review the Councils involvement in regional initiatives such as the Coventry, Solihull and Warwickshire Broadband Partnership with a view to improving the coverage of Superfast Broadband in Coventry.
3. Work with the Task and Finish groups of Scrutiny Boards 1 and 3, to meet with local Broadband suppliers (BT, Virginmedia, City Fibre etc.) to explore further opportunities for the improvement of the Superfast Broadband infrastructure within Coventry.

List of Appendices included:

Appendix 1 – Copy of petition text

Other useful background papers:

None

Has it been or will it be considered by Scrutiny?

No

Has it been or will it be considered by any other Council Committee, Advisory Panel or other body?

No

Will this report go to Council?

No

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Report title:

Report in response to petitions regarding provision of superfast broadband in New Stoke Village

1. Context (or background)

- 1.1 New Stoke Village is a new housing estate with ongoing building works on the site of the old Peugeot Plant. The initial build was started within the last 5 years.
- 1.2 Despite the recent build, the ability to provide superfast broadband within the development is limited and average broadband speeds within the area are typically between 1 and 3.5MB/Sec.
- 1.3 Consultation with both BT/Openreach and Virginmedia reveal that they currently have no plans to upgrade their services within the area to provide Superfast Broadband.

2. Options considered and recommended proposal

- 2.1 The Council has very limited powers to influence broadband providers to upgrade their existing infrastructure to allow for the provision of superfast Broadband within areas such as New Stoke Village.
- 2.2 The Council and indeed other partners in the City, recognise the ever increasing need for fast and reliable broadband for all residents and businesses across the City and this will be a key part of our Digital Strategy for Coventry which is being developed and will be taken for decision in the Autumn. We are working on many initiatives to ensure connectivity options are developed and available. However, it is important to state that the Council can only act in an influencing capacity as the development of broadband infrastructure is not the responsibility of the Council. BT and other providers, who do hold this responsibility, are working within the City to upgrade infrastructure on a commercial basis. Currently over 91% of the properties in the City have the opportunity to connect to superfast broadband (25 megabytes per second plus).
- 2.3 Both BT and Virginmedia have schemes available whereby residents can register an interest in Superfast broadband via their respective websites. Once they have received sufficient requests they are able to make a business case to upgrade or install the relevant superfast infrastructure in an area and connect the customers. There are also options via BT for residents to join together in 'Crowd Funding' groups to work jointly with BT to contribute towards the costs of infrastructure upgrades, where the BT business model would not normally fund the project.
- 2.4 The council is currently working with the Coventry Solihull and Warwickshire Broadband Partnership to submit two applications for external funding to improve broadband infrastructure in the city. All external funding bids work on the premise of creating jobs and business growth and enabling digital connectivity to local businesses. One of the significant bi-products of this is increasing accessibility for local residents who live near businesses that become broadband enabled. These bids are competitive and subject to match funding from the private and public sector. This funding is targeted at those areas that do not currently have access to superfast broadband coverage. Currently, funding is available from the European Regional Development Funding (ERDF) and the governments' Growth Deal. And the City Council is a stakeholder in both bids. Any match funding required would need to be affordable and would be subject to future cabinet and council approval.

- 2.5 An upgrade of the broadband infrastructure to serve business premises is likely to have a knock on effect of making Superfast broadband available to residential customers within the same area, subject to the residential premises being within distance of the area serviced by the upgraded infrastructure. The Council would work to influence to address areas where this is a known, however, the details would need to be worked through and there is no guarantee that New Stoke Village would benefit.
- 2.6 The Council recognises the impact on the limited access to superfast Broadband within the New Stoke Village area and Cabinet Member is recommended to:-
1. Respond to the petition organiser encouraging residents of New Stoke Village to register their requirements for access to superfast broadband with local broadband providers (BT and Virginmedia).
 2. Review the Councils involvement in regional initiatives such as the Coventry, Solihull and Warwickshire Broadband Partnership with a view to improving the coverage of Superfast Broadband in Coventry.
 3. Work with the Task and Finish groups of Scrutiny Boards 1 and 3, to meet with local Broadband suppliers (BT, Virginmedia, City Fibre etc.) to explore further opportunities for the improvement of the Superfast Broadband infrastructure within Coventry.

3. Results of consultation undertaken

- 3.1 Discussions have been undertaken with the main providers of Superfast Broadband to residential premises in the UK (BT and Virginmedia). Under their current development programme, there are no plans to extend or upgrade their infrastructure in New Stoke Village.
- 3.2 Discussions have been held with the Coventry, Solihull and Warwickshire Broadband Partnership (CSWP) about options for further involvement in the project. The CSWP Broadband project works with broadband providers to upgrade their infrastructure to provide Superfast Broadband to business premises within an area. An area would be eligible for inclusion in the project provided there is no superfast broadband available from any provider in that area.

At present, Coventry is not actively involved in the CSWP project as there was already sufficient market activity in Coventry at the time to meet the growing requirements and the matched funding could not be justified. Whilst there has been some progress on the development of the broadband infrastructure in Coventry, this has not been sufficient to meet the growing demands. Further involvement in the CSWP project would be dependent upon a commitment to match funding as part of the ERDF project proposal currently in progress. Any matched funding required would need to be affordable and would be subject to future cabinet and council approval.

- 3.3 The Council is working towards publishing a Digital Strategy for Coventry, which has the vision to 'Make Coventry a Digital Place'. The strategy specifically mentions the need for 'An effective and progressive digital connectivity infrastructure in the city, including broadband/fibre, mobile telecommunications (4G) and public Wi-Fi. This supports the Council's Local Plan and Government's Digital Communication Infrastructure Strategy ambitions.
- 3.4 The Council's Local Plan includes provision to ensure that all new residential developments in the City include provision for the inclusion of superfast Broadband infrastructure to

ensure that there is adequate capacity to meet the growing needs of the City.

- 3.5 A Digital Strategy Task & Finish Group has been set up to specifically review Digital provision in Coventry and a Member Digital Champion has been appointed. The remit of the Task and Finish group includes looking at the current broadband infrastructure provision in Coventry and how we can work better with partners like BT, Virginmedia, CityFibre and Warwicknet to achieve better provision for business and residents and any steps we can take nationally to influence this agenda and funding made available for it.

4. Timetable for implementing this decision

- 4.1 A written response can be made to the petition organisers, urging them to register an interest in Superfast Broadband with both BT and Virginmedia.
- 4.2 The council is a stakeholder in two external funds with the Coventry, Solihull and Warwickshire Broadband partnership with the aim of increasing superfast coverage across Coventry and Warwickshire. More news will be known towards the end of Quarter 3 and any successful bid will be subject to cabinet and council approval.

5. Comments from Executive Director, Resources

- 5.1 Financial implications
There are no direct financial costs as a result of the recommendations in this report

- 5.2 Legal implications
None

6. Other implications Any other specific implications

6.1 How will this contribute to achievement of the Council's key objectives / corporate priorities (corporate plan/scorecard) / organisational blueprint / Local Area Agreement (or Coventry Sustainable Community Strategy)?

The improved provision of Superfast Broadband will make Coventry an attractive area to both work and live, and will ultimately help to attract further investment in the City. The provision of Superfast Broadband in all new residential developments is already included as part of the Local Plan. In addition, the forthcoming Digital Strategy for Coventry will cover the need for an effective and progressive Digital connectivity infrastructure in the City, as this is a key element of its success.

6.2 How is risk being managed?

The ongoing risk of limited access to Superfast Broadband is already being reviewed by Councillors and Council Officers including as part of the Digital Task & Finish Group.

6.3 What is the impact on the organisation?

None

6.4 Equalities / EIA

N/A

6.5 Implications for (or impact on) the environment

None

6.6 Implications for partner organisations?

Improvements to access to superfast Broadband in both residential and business premises will ultimately lead to better access to services provided by partner organisations.

Private sector partners have a key role to play in this agenda.

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This report is published on the council's website:
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Appendix 1

E-petition:

Fibre Optic Broadband New Stoke Village

Description

Having lived in New Stoke Village for over 4 years there has been a steady decline in broadband speeds, with current performance in the area averaging 1Mb - 3.5Mb. Myself and many other residents find the speeds on offer unbearable and i believe a petition was raised in 2014 about the quality of the broadband. The estate has now grown even more, and continues to grow which is putting a massive strain on the current infrastructure and is only compounding the problem further. For a real world example of just how poor the broadband is in the area, no more than two people can stream a youtube video simultaneously in my house without it causing buffering. Furthermore companies such as EE won't offer some services such as EE TV because the internet speeds do not meet there required minimum. It simply has got to the point where the internet speeds are no longer meeting the requirements for modern technology.

I have been in contact with CSW Broadband and understand that there is no current plan to roll out fibre-optic broadband in this area or any of the new build areas across Coventry. It is my understanding that Coventry City Council has not contributed any funding towards CSW Broadband for upgrades of the network in Contract 1 or Contract 2 hence why there is no plan to bring Fibre Optic roll-out does not include these areas.

I have begun discussions with Openreach to find out more about the community fibre partnership in order to get an understanding of the investment needed to bring fibre optic to our community.

This is a petition for Coventry City Council to help the residents in the area by providing support and funding for an improvement to the broadband speeds. Either through supporting a community fibre partnership or making funds available for Contract 3 of the CSW fibre rollout.

Paper petition:

We the undersigned call on the City Council to improve broadband speeds in our area.