

Cabinet Member Report to County Council

8 December 2016

Cabinet Member:	Councillor Jane Storey Cabinet Member for Broadband, Rural Issues and Localities
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1. Better Broadband for Suffolk

Suffolk Better Broadband Update

We have now completed the first contract with BT. This took the circa 50% existing fibre coverage in Suffolk and extended it up to around 85% coverage of all premises in the county. Following on from this, we have started our second scheme, which will see us reach over 96% premises coverage in the county by 2019. We have announced the first two phases of this scheme, and are now pleased to announce the initial tranche of the third phase. The areas covered by these phases are listed in the tables in the latest newsletter shown on the interactive website map.

For the remaining phases of the second contract, we will be making further announcements regarding new areas of coverage every 3-6 months. It is worth pointing out that the programme is very fluid, and there is a strong chance that upgrades could be pulled forwards and backwards. BT are required to hit strict contractual milestones relating to building and commissioning the network. Each milestone or phase requires a number of premises to be upgraded between now and the end of 2019. Whilst a general view of the broad areas which these will fall in exists, it is not until the survey phase at the beginning of each milestone that we know precisely what the build will include. For example, if a survey uncovers an issue, that area may have to fall back to a later milestone, and another area might need to be fast tracked into an earlier milestone. The "net" outcome to date is that we have not yet had to de-scope a single area from the contract, albeit there is some limited "shuffling" of areas back and forth as required from an engineering perspective. This will become more and more relevant in the second contract; so it is harder to forecast with certainty when an area will be upgraded. Therefore, whilst the broad target is a particular phase, there is a chance of this coming forwards or backwards, for these reasons. Each 3-6 months we will publicise the latest build list in order that it can be tracked and shared as best as possible.

We also have a scheme open to anybody who currently gets less than 2Mbps. This offers a connection voucher for satellite and wireless operators,

and is aimed at providing an interim solution whilst our fibre rollout progresses. It is important that we have chosen to add wireless broadband providers to this scheme, as it means that the variety of options is increased for those who have to wait a little longer for fibre. For more information, or to register as a provider on this scheme, please visit:

<http://www.betterbroadbandsuffolk.com/ApplicationForm.aspx>

For the 3-4% of Suffolk which we will not reach under our existing scheme, government are currently formulating an approach to a “Universal Service Obligation” of 10Mbps for all premises by 2020. This is not finalised as yet, and the SCC view is that we will do all we can to progress the fibre rollout as far above and beyond the 96% we currently have contracted, avoiding a digital divide in Suffolk.

I am also pleased to announce that take-up of services continues to rise. We are currently at 38% take-up of the new services in Suffolk. This, will lead to further funding being clawed back from BT, and we can invest it through the most suitable means with a view to increasing our current 98% target further still.

Finally, a reminder that the team are here to help with any queries and issues, and can be contacted at broadband@suffolk.gov.uk.

For further information, please contact: Jonathan Chown; Email: jonathan.chown@suffolk.gov.uk, Telephone: 01473 265211.

2. Rural Issues

Rural Summit ('Flourish') Update

A meeting of the Steering Group was held on Friday 25 November 2016. The group have agreed several headings for work (with suggested lead to be confirmed in brackets) that include:

- Broadband and Mobile (PCC Tim Passmore)
- Community Transport (Shona Bendix)
- Rural Business (James Buckle)
- Aspiration, skills and jobs (Seckford Foundation)
- Strengthening Communities (Sara Blake)
- Access to Justice (ISCRE)

Jasmine Joolia from Suffolk County Council is leading on the Young Flourish work and the first event to engage young people took place at Ixworth Free School on 30 November.

I will be happy to provide PCC Tim Passmore with the help and support he requires.

The plan is to launch the rural action plan at the Suffolk Show in 2017. The next meeting of the Flourish Steering Group will be towards the end of January 2017.

European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) update

New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) have been working with DEFRA to agree Calls for projects that are expected to be launched in early January 2017 and are likely to remain open for approximately 12 to 18 months. New Anglia LEP are keen to ensure that local stakeholders are well prepared to take advantage of these funding opportunities whilst they are still available. In New Anglia, new Calls with an overall value of around £11m will be published seeking projects under the following EAFRD Growth Programme Sub-Measures and are relevant for a range of rural businesses:

- 4.2 Food Processing
- 6.4 Business Development
- 7.5 Tourism Infrastructure
- 16.3 Tourism Co-operation

Autumn Statement – rural impacts:

Most of the measures in the Autumn Statement are likely to have a limited and neutral effect on rural areas. Several areas to note are:

- Fuel duty – the Chancellor has cancelled the rise in fuel duty which is seen as good news for rural motorists who generally have to travel further to access services and employment. Government has quoted a saving of £130 per year on average for motorists as a result of no increased fuel duty.
- Pensions - Pensioners have benefited since 2010 from the so-called “triple-lock”, a guarantee that the state pension will go up every year by either inflation, the average rise in earnings or 2.5%, whichever is the highest. The Chancellor vowed the government would meet the pledge to protect pensions until 2020 however after that it will need to look at “the challenges of rising longevity and fiscal sustainability”. For Suffolk this could be a challenge with higher than average numbers of pensioners and many older people’s issues being exacerbated by rurality.
- Rural Rate Relief – has been doubled from 50% to 100% for rural businesses. Small businesses and rural shops can qualify for relief and it can often make the difference for marginal businesses who provide essential services for rural residents.
- Funding for housing in rural areas – the Rural Services Network (RSN) has called for at least 20% of the £300m of additional capital grant for housing associations (equivalent to £60m per year) to be invested in a dedicated Rural Housing Programme so there is a guaranteed benefit to rural communities. The RSN fear the funding will be targeted almost

exclusively at so-called 'affordable rent' properties and low-cost home ownership. Both measures are of some use, but will not address the problems facing rural residents who are least well off.

For further information please contact: Frances Bedding; Email: frances.bedding@suffolk.gov.uk, Telephone: 07714 854998.