

Connectivity in the Borough	13 September 2016
To: The Leisure and Development Committee For Information	

Linkage to Council Strategy (2015-19)	
Strategic Theme	Accelerating Our Economy & Contributing To Prosperity
Outcome	Identification of worst areas of connectivity for business and residential broadband
Lead Officer	Paul Beattie
Cost: (If applicable)	£2,500 from existing budget

The purpose of this report is to develop a first step to implementing a solution for some of the Borough’s connectivity issues

Background

Members will be aware from their own experiences, contact with constituents, and information brought to committee that several areas in the Borough have a range of connectivity issues when it comes to broadband and connection to the internet.

Staff can also attest to receiving at least one request for assistance each week in writing from members of the public.

Unfortunately, to this point, the response has been limited to liaising with OFCOM, forwarding relevant details, trying to liaise with various telecoms companies, or pointing local residents towards more costly solutions which do not always work. There also remain those areas which are classed as “not-spots”.

Members will be aware that there is the potential for funding under the Rural Development Programme for solutions in limited areas with a limited budget. However, to date, two important elements of information have been missing:

- The clear identification and scope of the areas where the problem is worst.
- Ideas for group or area based solutions.

First steps

As a possible pre-cursor to a more detailed solutions report for some specific areas, Council requires a research report that examines the Council area as a whole and identifies those with the worst broadband service.

It is envisaged that the research will be a desk exercise that examines and incorporates all available information from the relevant section within the Department for the Economy (formerly DETI Telecommunications), Ofcom, Service Providers, and others.

This information should also include the projected improvements that are being scheduled by BT.

The second element of the research required is to prioritise 4 areas/communities (one for each of the former Council areas) in terms of potential for a local solution. That local solution should consider the following objectives:

- Improving peoples' experience with quicker communication thanks to higher upload and download speeds.
- Potential Funding and Investment.
- Future-proofing with the latest technology to meet customers' needs.
- Business growth through increased competitiveness in local and international markets.

Outcomes

The outcomes from this are straightforward:

- A proper snapshot of the problem at hand, with specialist input, "making sense" of the huge amount of available, but disjointed information.
- A focus on the borough's worst areas, with an objective view on the problems at hand for these areas – including data on available speeds.
- A round-up of the latest technical solutions.
- Potential direction for the allocation of funding for this area of work, for the Rural Development Programme.

This last point is especially pertinent – as members involved with RDP will know, if a solution is not available, the connectivity funding which has been set aside will be subsumed into other measures, and an opportunity will be lost. At the very least, this report will provide members with the information required to set in place a lobbying strategy with the relevant providers and industry players.

Recommendation

It is therefore recommended that members agree the progression of this work. It is anticipated that the timetable will be around two months, and the results, recommendations and potential direction for future development will be brought to committee before Christmas.