



Economic Growth Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the meeting held at County Hall, Colliton Park,
Dorchester, Dorset, DT1 1XJ on Wednesday, 25 January 2017

Present:

Daryl Turner (Chairman)

Hilary Cox, Richard Biggs, Andy Canning, Ronald Coatsworth, Mike Lovell and William Trite

Members attending:

Peter Finney (Deputy Leader of the County Council and Cabinet Member for Environment, Infrastructure and Highways) and Colin Jamieson (Cabinet Member for Economy and Growth).

Officers Attending:

Mike Harries (Director for Environment and the Economy), Matthew Piles (Service Director – Economy), Mark Taylor (Group Manager – Governance and Assurance), Penny Syddall (Senior Communications Officer (Superfast)), Dugald Lockhart (Superfast Dorset Senior Programme Manager), John Alexander (Senior Assurance Manager), Michael Carhart-Harris (Senior Communications Officer) and David Northover (Senior Democratic Services Officer).

Participants

Grant Munn - BT, Senior Programme Manager
Steven Earwicker - Kimmeridge resident
Carol Matthews - Charlton Down resident
Archie Ruddick - pupil, The Thomas Hardy School
Jordan Moon - pupil, The Thomas Hardy School
Jon Dean - Assistant Head, The Thomas Hardy School
Neville Loder - Tenant, Dairy Farm, Osborne - County Farms Estate

(Notes: These minutes have been prepared by officers as a record of the meeting and of any decisions reached. They are to be considered and confirmed at the next meeting of the Cabinet to be held on **Monday, 27 March 2017.**)

Apologies

1 Apologies for absence were received from Mike Byatt, Mervyn Jeffery and Margaret Phipps.

Code of Conduct

2 There were no declarations by members of disclosable pecuniary interest under the Code of Conduct.

Minutes

3 The minutes of the meeting held on 12 October 2016 were confirmed and signed.

Public Participation

4 There were no public questions, statements or requests to speak received.

Scrutiny of delivery of Digital Infrastructure Strategy

5 Arising from discussion at the meeting on 12 October 2016, the Committee took the opportunity to scrutinise the progress being made in implementing the County Councils' Digital Infrastructure Strategy, what this entailed, how it was applied and the progress being made in making connectivity improvements. The report by the Service Director – Economy set out what successes there had been in making improvements, how these had been achieved and by what means. The attention of

the Committee was drawn to the progress made to date of the Council's Superfast Dorset Programme which provided gap funding to support the rollout of broadband in areas not deemed commercially viable by infrastructure providers.

The Committee was informed that the Strategy was designed to set out the overall vision and approach to transform Dorset into a digital economy in order to fully realise strategic benefits of economic growth, digital inclusion, transformation of public services and opportunities for individuals and communities across Dorset. The Strategy included reference to the speed and coverage of broadband, and the opportunities for Mobile 4G/5G to play a part in this.

Of particular importance to the Committee was to know how improvements might continue to be delivered, with a specific view to identifying solutions to meet the needs of those currently having limited, little or no reception and to understand what was being done to achieve this.

As part of this process, the opportunity was being provided for service providers and users to join the meeting to explain to the Committee:-

- The part being played in providing Superfast Broadband and connectivity to Dorset residents and what was being done to reach those areas identified as having limited, little or no reception; and
- What connectivity meant to those receiving the service, how their needs were being met and what the Strategy might be able to do for them in improving that service.

The invitees were given the opportunity to address the Committee so that they might hear what they had to say about the Strategy and for members to ask questions of them in order to gain a better understanding of how superfast broadband was being delivered across the county and what part the Committee might play in enabling this.

The Committee was being asked to assess the progress being made and how improvements could continue to be made for accessibility to broadband. It was considered that the benefits to Dorset from this could well lead to the generation of significant economic and social prosperity. The Committee recognised that delivering the Superfast Broadband initiative was integral to the delivery of services in a more direct, flexible and accessible way.

In setting the scene, the Cabinet Member for Economic Growth explained how important connectivity was considered to be for the prosperity of Dorset and having the means to access it was considered to be essential. Giving all residents the same opportunity to access it was an obligation the Council was determined to fulfil and all was being done to achieve this.

The Committee first heard from Grant Munn of BT who explained what had already been achieved, including what had been done to extend coverage to hard to reach communities. He outlined what might yet be able to be achieved and the technologies available in doing this; the areas of coverage and the speeds associated with this; and what limitations there were in being able to achieve all that they might.

Members were informed what Fibre to the Cabinet (FTTC) was able to achieve in comparison to Fibre to the Premise (FTTP) and Mr Munn showed how the relationship between the cabinet and the premises determined what broadband speeds were available to an individual property. He explained the technologies associated with this and how these were being applied, the process for deliverability and what practicalities there were. Innovations in technologies to improve how broadband could be delivered were constantly evolving, with wireless and satellite technologies playing a significant part.

He considered that communities should be encouraged to contribute towards the means of initiating schemes via the Community Fibre Partnership arrangements available to them and felt that this approach was critical in any successful delivery.

Overall he confirmed that BT remained committed to working in partnership with Superfast Dorset to ensure the maximum coverage possible was available.

The Superfast Dorset Senior Programme Manager outlined progress being made in the delivery of the Superfast Broadband Programme and what this entailed. This included what Superfast Dorset had already been able to achieve; what might be able to be achieved and, critically, what was being done to extend coverage to hard to reach communities which had limited, little or no reception. The Committee's attention was drawn to the practicalities and technicalities of delivering the project and what was being done to improve accessibility to it.

The Superfast Dorset project aimed to deliver the most appropriate Superfast broadband solution practicable, maximising benefits in a cost effective manner across the business and domestic community where it was not deemed to be otherwise commercially viable. The Strategy provided a basis for the successful delivery of superfast broadband. In particular, it was considered that the work of the Committee would help to play a significant part in transforming the strategy into the delivery of outcomes.

The relationship between BT, BDUK, Superfast Dorset and the County Council and the part each played was outlined; along with the technologies involved; the areas of coverage and speeds associated with this. How the Council played its part in facilitating accessibility and delivery was drawn to the Committee's attention. The current Superfast Dorset contract had now reached 97% of the premises in Dorset, including Bournemouth and Poole. Reaching the final 3% and identifying solutions for their connectivity remained a considerable challenge.

Officers reported that since January 2016 work had been taking place to identify "not spots": areas that would still be left without access to superfast broadband once all current activity had been completed. Given that the Government had made a commitment that universal access to the internet was by right - comparable to any other utility - and that this should be fulfilled by 2020, the Council was committed to facilitating that commitment.

The contract which had been entered into with BT in 2013 was designed to provide a step change in the capability of individuals and businesses to access fast and reliable broadband and in the means of delivering this. Whilst this had proven to be successful, it had been recognised from the outset that a small proportion of premises would be unable to access superfast broadband for the funding level which had been agreed and that there would have to be alternative means of achieving this. Given that the contract with BT was now nearing completion and having achieved as much as it already had over the 4 years, the need to identify alternative means was becoming more critical. However as future contracting arrangements were currently in the process of being considered, little more could be said about this at this stage.

As an example, officers explained what could be achieved at Thornford and Thorncombe and what obstacles still prevailed in such places. Improved mapping for each community/parish was assisting considerably in identifying where "not spots" occurred and officers emphasised that it was critical how this data was interpreted to ensure focussed activity was targeted appropriately.

Flexibility in modelling was essential to ensure that the means of delivering what was

right for a particular community was practicable. Officers considered it crucial that local communities were engaged in the process to determine their ambitions and aspirations. Officers considered it fundamental for broadband provision to be accommodated within the construction design for any new housing development and developers should be made aware of this aspiration.

How the Programme was funded was explained including the part both the voucher scheme and the Better Broadband Subsidy Scheme played in the process and how they could benefit accessibility to broadband. These schemes provided the basis to enable individuals and communities to gain access to progress schemes in their own right that might not otherwise be readily available to them. Critical to the success of the Programme was take up and how this might be best encouraged. It was hoped that once the benefits were seen, then take up would escalate. It was seen to be in the interest of all that the greater the rate and volume of take up, the more funding would be available for investment back into the Programme via the "Gainshare" initiative.

Officers reaffirmed what investment the County Council along with other public bodies, in partnership with BT, were making in fulfilling their commitment to rolling out broadband via the Superfast Dorset Programme.

The Committee acknowledged the progress being made and the processes involved in delivering it. However it recognised that economic, commercial and technological barriers remained. Nonetheless, the Committee fully understood the socio-economic benefits that connectivity brought.

The Committee heard from Stephen Earwicker who explained that, in his time as a GP, there had been a need for access to a reliable internet connection, which did not exist when he settled in Kimmeridge 11 years ago. In order for him to be able to effectively fulfil his duties, he realised - along with the community as a whole - that improvements were necessary. He explained the inadequate arrangements previously experienced and what action had been taken to rectify this. However recently significant improvements had been made in that an independent provider, VoIP, had arranged for the village's reception to be beamed across Weymouth Bay from Portland, with discrete dishes channelling this into homes. Given that The Etches Collection - Museum of Jurassic Marine Life had recently opened in the village, this had attracted interest for improved broadband coverage. The benefit this had brought to the community was immeasurable. The Committee considered that, where practicable, more communities should adopt this approach, in identifying a distinct anchor feature to primarily benefit from improved broadband provision which might, in turn, serve to attract commercial interest for improved provision to benefit all.

Carol Matthews addressed the Committee to highlight what benefits she had seen at her home at Charlton Down as a result of FTTP being installed. Significant improvements had now been made to the internet speed accessible to her, this having a positive effect on what she was able to readily access.

Archie Ruddick and Jordan Moon explained what limited access they had to online opportunities where they lived in Moreton and Piddlehinton respectively. This limited coverage, both for internet and mobile phone usage, denied them opportunities that were available to other students at the Thomas Hardy School to study and socialise. With an expectation that coursework and homework could be readily accessible and completed on line, they were disenfranchised by the current arrangements, not least because their transport arrangements prevented them from using of the school's IT suite at the end of the school day. They considered that a more readily available and reliable service would be of considerable benefit to both of them. Jon Dean confirmed that there was a general expectation that pupil's homework would be accessible on line and sympathised with the situation in which the boys found themselves.

The Committee was informed by officers that it was hoped that both Moreton and Piddlehinton would in the near future benefit from improvements to digital accessibility and as a means of going some way to identifying a practical solution in the first instance, the Service Director – Economy agreed to investigate what could be done to better manage their travel arrangements to fit in with the boy's ability to use the school's IT after school hours. Officers also agreed to take the opportunity to look at how the school's internet grant scheme could be applied to see if it was possible to address the pupil's need by this means.

Finally, Neville Loder, tenant at Dairy Farm on the County Farms Estate, addressed members about what accessibility to broadband meant for the way in which he was able to manage his farm. Whilst he had access to basic broadband, his experience was that this was limited, unreliable and intermittent. As well as the practical application for how the farm was run on a daily basis and in addressing rural isolation, having access to reliable superfast broadband was now a fundamental requirement in how farming businesses were managed, with this being essential in how submissions were made to DEFRA. Access to market information and how produce was bought and sold was equally necessary. Equally important to Mr Loder in how the farm was run was the need for accessibility to a strong and dependable mobile signal for communication purposes.

So as to go some way to addressing the issues raised, given the importance of the rural economy to the prosperity of Dorset, the Committee agreed that the Chairman of the County Farms Liaison Panel, Councillor Hillary Cox, should write on their behalf to DEFRA drawing their attention to the issues raised and stating that if there was an expectation that returns to DEFRA should be made on line, then the means of submitting this should be improved.

The Committee then took the opportunity to discuss the merits of the progress being made and agreed that, in principle, every effort should be made to facilitate the provision of Superfast Broadband throughout the County, which demonstrated the Council's continued commitment towards this. The importance that universal provision of Superfast Broadband to the future economic and social prosperity of Dorset was acknowledged.

Whilst appreciating the principle of the Strategy and what it was designed to achieve, the Committee considered that there was now the need to identify more readily how outcomes could be delivered and by whatever means was possible and practical. As such an update was requested of their meeting in June 2017 on what further improvements were being made within the Programme and, critically, on how 4G/5G mobile phone coverage could be improved and signal coverage maximised.

Members appreciated the commitment being made to try to identify a means by which Superfast Broadband provision might be made more readily accessible to hard to reach communities within Dorset and how this might be delivered. Accordingly, the County Council was obliged to investigate the practicalities of delivering a Superfast solution, either by conventional, terrestrial means or by alternative technologies and suppliers.

The Committee empathised with communities, individuals and businesses who continued to operate with inefficient broadband and it was an ambition that fast and reliable broadband should be made available to all. It was recognised that prosperity in Dorset could be achieved through economic growth, with the most effective and efficient way of achieving this being by investing in digital infrastructure and skills. Accordingly, the Council remained committed to successfully providing the means by which greater accessibility to Superfast Broadband might be achieved and the value this brought.

Members thanked all those who had contributed to the debate. How the meeting had been conducted reflected a positive approach that was designed to be more dynamic in its delivery process so that members could have that better understanding of what connectivity meant to residents of Dorset and what was being done to achieve this. They appreciated having the opportunity to hear from those members of local communities direct in telling their own broadband stories. Hearing from a cross section of Dorset residents on what they considered worked well, what worked not so well and what improvements could be made was fundamental in their understanding of what outcomes might be realised. Hearing how residents of rural communities had worked direct with third parties to realise their own small-scale community broadband schemes was enlightening and showed what could be achieved.

By introducing this participatory approach, Councillors were pleased to be able to engage directly with members of the community to hear what difference had been made - or not - to their lives. This approach was seen to bring about greater accountability for outcomes to the democratic process so as to delivering the most appropriate solutions for the people of Dorset.

Given what they had heard, the Committee agreed that the following outcomes should be actively pursued:-

- That broadband provision was fundamental within the construction design for any new housing development and developers should be made aware of this aspiration.
- That critical to the success of the Programme was to encourage take up and how this might be best pursued.
- That the Chairman of the County Farms Liaison Panel, Councillor Hillary Cox, be asked to write to DEFRA drawing their attention to the issues raised on behalf of the farming community about improved access to broadband to meet DEFRA's own expectations.
- That the Service Director – Economy investigate the practicalities of how school travel arrangements might be managed to meet the needs of those wishing to access facilities after school.
- That the Committee receive a report updating on how 4G/5G mobile phone coverage could be improved and signal coverage maximised and what further improvements were made to the superfast programme.

Resolved

That the Superfast Dorset Programme and Strategy continue to be endorsed and the actions set out in bullet points above be actively pursued.

Reason for Decision

In the interests of enabling economic growth and to engage with the residents of Dorset in identifying practical solutions and positive outcomes.

Notice of Motion Clause 21 of the Bus Bill/ Bus Subsidies Working Group

6 The Committee took the opportunity to consider the motion 'Clause 21 of the Bus Bill' proposed by Councillor Ros Kayes, County Councillor for Bridport, which had been submitted in the first instance to Full Council on 10 November 2016. The motion was primarily concerned with the effect the Bill would have on effectively prohibiting a local authority from forming a company for the purposes of providing a local bus service, which might in turn have an adverse effect on the effectiveness of any combined authority.

Although there currently were no plans for the Authority to pursue the formation of an 'arms length' company for the purposes of running their own service, Clause 21 of the Bus Bill sought to deny local authorities the opportunity of doing this if they so wished. Accordingly it was felt that they would be disenfranchised in their ability to pursue this course of action if they considered this to be viable option. As it stood, Clause 21

would limit local authorities options on how they were able to proceed in managing these arrangements and determine the grounds on which services were able to operate.

Accordingly, as the motion considered that Clause 21 contradicted the general powers of competence and the spirit of the Localism Act 2011 and given the weight of public support for local bus services, it asked for support from the Committee that Clause 21 should be omitted from the Bus Services Bill and that a submission be made to the Secretary of State on this matter.

In light of the fact that the Bill was progressing through Parliament, the motion encouraged the County Council to play their part in influencing how this proceeded and on what basis this should be. The Committee considered it necessary to do what could be done whilst there was still an opportunity for it to be done. Additionally, a statement was circulated to the Committee from Councillor Kayes further emphasising the importance of opposing Clause 21.

So as to take the opportunity to influence proceedings at the earliest possible stage and to ensure progress could be made as soon as practicable, as part of the discussions of the Bus Subsidies Working Group on 29 November 2016 the opportunity was taken to consider - on an informal basis - the motion in advance of it being formally considered by Committee.

Whilst the motion did not directly relate to the issue of bus subsidies, it was felt that the principle of the motion had a bearing on how passenger transport could be delivered in future years. On that basis the Group felt that, in principle, the motion had merit. Arising from that meeting, a position statement was made available to all members setting out the facts and what these entailed about how Clause 21 would affect the County Council's ability to manage its own passenger transport arrangements as it chose and saw fit.

This allowed members to be able to make an informed judgement on their merit and gave them the opportunity in their own right to use this a basis for making any representation they considered appropriate to their respective MP, as a means of influence.

The Committee endorsed the approach taken and the broad principle of the motion, its merits and what it was designed to achieve and considered it appropriate that Cabinet be asked to endorse this.

The Committee's attention was also drawn to the primary purpose of the work of the Bus Subsidies Working Group - in considering evidence of the reasoning for the decisions taken by Cabinet for how bus subsidies would be managed and applied in the future.

In order to determine what process had been followed for the reasoning behind the decisions taken by Cabinet about how bus subsidies should be managed, there was a need to understand if that process was delivering what it was designed to achieve and in a way that was sustainable and manageable. Given this, the Group had asked that evidence should be provided on the criteria identified to determine this. Each criterion was assessed to see on what basis the decisions taken had been made, what had been taken into account in coming to that decision and the reasoning for this. From this analysis, evidence had been able to be provided which showed that the decisions taken were on the basis of agreed strategies, policies and plans and that the application of these had formed the basis on how bus subsidies should be managed and, crucially, the reasoning for this.

The Group were therefore satisfied with the reasoning provided, which was seen as

being the justification for the decisions made. The Committee endorsed the opinion of the Group and thanked them for their work.

Resolved

That the Chairman of the Committee, the Cabinet Member for the Environment, Infrastructure and Highways and the Director for Environment and the Economy write to the Secretary of State on the basis of the motion.

That the opinion of the Bus Subsidies Working Group of the reasoning for the decisions taken by Cabinet for how bus subsidies would be managed and applied in the future be endorsed.

Recommended

That Cabinet be asked to endorse the approach taken by the Committee and their broad support for the principle of the motion, and that the Leader might consider agreeing to add his name to the letter being written.

Reason for Decision/Recommendation

To ensure that the County Council was able to maintain and fulfil its obligation in how passenger transport could be best delivered in future years.

Corporate Plan: Outcomes Focused Monitoring Report

7 The Committee considered a joint report by the Chief Executive and the Director for Environment and the Economy which drew attention to the set of “outcome indicators” to measure performance related specifically to the prosperous outcome within the Corporate Plan.

The Committee agreed that the improved take up of Superfast Broadband should be actively pursued given that access to digital connectivity was fundamental to all that the County Council was trying to do. They Committee recognised that members had a key role to play in what progress might be made and how this could be done.

Members found Appendix 2 of the report to be the most helpful in their understanding of what progress was being made and their attention was drawn to the “outcomes tracker” for their use.

Members felt that whilst emphasis was placed on exception reporting in identifying what interventions might be appropriate, successes and improvements should also be recognised to demonstrate what was being done well and which could be used as good practice elsewhere. The Committee was invited to identify issues which they considered had scope for further scrutiny and to inform the Clerk and/or Chairman of this.

The Committee considered that this new process was a good basis for progress to be made in outcomes being realised.

Noted

Proposal for a Parking Management Policy Development Panel

- 8 The Committee was provided with the opportunity to consider the need for a Policy Development Panel for Parking Management to be established. Members considered that, in principle, this should be progressed but that this should be held in abeyance pending the outcome of a decision on Local Government Reform. Any arrangements would need to be holistic to encompass both off street and on street parking and to determine what part the County and District Councils played.

Noted

Work Programme

- 9 The opportunity was taken to look at the Committee's Work Programme. Members were encouraged to contribute towards this if they wished and to let the Chairman and/or Committee Clerk know accordingly.

Members agreed that the Industrial Strategy should be considered at their next meeting, in March 2017.

Further to earlier discussion, the Committee agreed that Mobile Phone Coverage 4G/5G should be considered at the June 2017 meeting, together with an update on what progress was being made with the broadband rollout.

The opportunity was taken to inform the Committee that Dorset had been successful in receiving an allocation from the Productivity Investment Fund of £2.5m which would be used towards improvements to the north/south strategic route.

Resolved

That the Work Programme include consideration of the Industrial Strategy at the March 2017 meeting and an update on Mobile Phone coverage, together with broadband progress, at the June 2017 meeting.

Reason for Recommendation

To improve outcomes for the people of Dorset.

Questions from County Councillors

- 10 No questions were asked by members under Standing Order 20(2)

Meeting Duration: 10.00 am - 12.45 pm