

## **PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

Minutes of a meeting of the Performance Scrutiny Committee held in Conference Room 1a, County Hall, Ruthin on Thursday, 28 April 2016 at 10.00 am.

### **PRESENT**

Councillors Huw Hilditch-Roberts, Geraint Lloyd-Williams, Barry Mellor (Chair), Dewi Owens, Arwel Roberts, Gareth Sandilands and Joe Welch.

Councillor Hugh Evans attended at the Committee's invitation.

### **ALSO PRESENT**

Chief Executive (MM), Corporate Director: Economy and Public Realm (RM), Scrutiny Co-ordinator (RE), WAO Representative (CO), BT Representatives Mr Martin Jones (BT/NGA Programme Manager Wales) and Mr Geraint Strello (Regional Manager for Wales - BT), and Administrative Officer (CIW).

#### **1 APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Raymond Bartley, Meirick Davies and Colin Hughes.

#### **2 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS**

No Members declared any personal or prejudicial interests in any business identified to be considered at the meeting.

#### **3 URGENT MATTERS AS AGREED BY THE CHAIR**

No items were raised which in the opinion of the Chair, should be considered at the meeting as a matter of urgency pursuant to Section 100B(4) of the Local Government Act, 1972.

#### **4 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING**

The Minutes of a meeting of the Performance Scrutiny Committee held on Thursday, 17<sup>th</sup> March, 2016 were submitted.

Matters arising:-

4. Minutes of Last Meeting, (6) Primary School Transport – Councillor A. Roberts expressed his appreciation for the work undertaken by the Officers from the Education Department in respect of the school transport arrangements for children from Rhuddlan attending Ysgol Dewi Sant, Rhyl. He was of the view that the Department's staff had made every effort possible to find a solution to the problem.

**RESOLVED** – *that the Minutes be received and approved as a correct record.*

## 5 SUPERFAST CYMRU ROLLOUT IN DENBIGHSHIRE

The Chair welcomed BT representatives (BTRs) Mr Martin Jones, BT/NGA Programme Manager Wales, and Mr Geraint Strello, Regional Manager for Wales, to the meeting.

The Chair expressed concern that despite invitation having been extended to Welsh Government representatives to attend the meeting and contribute to the discussion, the invitations had been declined.

BT's Superfast Cymru Programme Manager gave a presentation detailing the background and progress to date with the Superfast Cymru programme. He:-

- advised that the Superfast Cymru Programme was in addition to BT's commercial fibre optic roll-out and formed part of a £2.5bn investment in fibre based broadband;
- the Superfast Cymru roll-out priorities had been defined by Welsh Government (WG);
- emphasised that the aim of the programme was to roll out the most cost effective broadband network that would benefit as many people in Wales as possible, in particular those that would not benefit from any commercial fibre optic programme;
- Stated that it was a huge engineering project and on this basis an intervention area had been identified across Wales, mainly in rural areas, within which 750,000 premises could potentially benefit from Superfast fibre optic broadband. To date 600,000 premises had been enabled, with a further 150,000 to be enabled;
- whilst the roll-out programme was designed to benefit the economy, i.e. via roll-outs to Enterprise Zones and Local Growth Zones, it was also designed to improve social/community connectivity and mitigate wherever possible against digital exclusion. Consequently the programme was being deployed to both rural and urban areas at the same time so that both business and consumer customers could benefit;
- detailed both the 'fibre to the cabinet' (FTCC) and 'fibre to the premises' (FTTP) roll-out work, the number of structures that needed to be built to deliver both services and the number of premises that would benefit from both schemes;
- stated that to date 111 of the 177 planned structures had been built, supporting 22,060 of the 29,720 premises identified to benefit under the programme. This equated to 74% of the programme being completed;
- advised that 66 structures were still to be delivered, supporting 7,660 premises – these figures were broken down as follows FTTC: 19 structures supporting 1068 premises and FTTP: 47 structures supporting 6592 premises. These remaining structures would be delivered by the end of March 2018, with FTTP forming the largest part of the remainder of the work to be carried out;
- stated that 77% of Denbighshire could now access Superfast Fibre Optic Broadband if they wished, accessibility across Wales at present averaged 85.6%. However, the overall aim was for circa 95% of Denbighshire to potentially have access by the end of the rollout programme;

- advised that whilst the 'green cabinets' had been installed in most areas by now, they were not all 'live' at present. There were issues with wayleave agreements that were holding up 'go live' dates in certain areas;
- emphasised that BT installed the infrastructure to bring Superfast Fibre Optic Broadband to communities, however individual householders or businesses would need to apply for a superfast broadband service to their own premises, no premises were automatically connected to the network;
- advised that work was currently underway in relation to planning options for proposed delivery of fibre optic broadband to those areas that even FTTP could not reach at present;
- Stated that BT had a 'never say no' policy and would endeavour to work with businesses, communities and individuals in an attempt to meet their needs. Details were given of a number of programmes or initiatives which residents, who could not at present access fibre optic broadband provision from any of the main providers, may benefit from.

In response to questions from Members of the Committee and senior officers, BT representatives advised:-

- that information on the availability of the Superfast Cymru service in an area was communicated via stickers on 'green' cabinets, adverts in local and regional newspapers and on buses etc. Wide use was also made of social media and the internet to advertise and promote the service's availability. If individuals registered with the Superfast Cymru website they would receive regular e-mails and newsletters advising them of progress with the roll-out;
- that the WG itself would be taking over responsibility for communications on the Superfast Cymru Programme from June 2016, and arrangements were currently underway for the transfer of this from BT to WG. BT currently had very limited resources to support the communication side of the roll-out programme. Nevertheless BT representatives had attended large national and regional events in a bid to promote the rollout programme. Despite being such a small team they would endeavour to work with councillors within their communities to promote the availability of Superfast Cymru;
- that it was BT's strategy to as quickly as possible get as many premises as possible enabled to access superfast fibre optic broadband if they wished;
- that customers who could access FTTC could request FTTP, however it would not be provided as part of the current roll-out programme, as the objective of this programme was to provide a superfast fibre optic service to premises in the most cost effective way. FTTP was far dearer to provide. In such cases BT would accept the charges for the first 1,000m and then the customer would bear the remainder of the cost;
- that when fibre optic was delivered via FTTC, it was fibre optic to the 'green cabinet' and it would then be via copper wire to the premises. This worked well for distances of up to 3km. The closer to the 'green cabinet' the premises was located the better, as speed was lost the longer the length of copper information had to travel;
- that copper wiring may be withdrawn in the long-term but this would not happen in the near future. Pilots for other types of fibre speed provision were being run in certain areas of the country at present, these included a G.fast pilot in

Swansea, which was looking at delivering fibre speed via copper wiring, another pilot was one trialling the Vectra system. However, technology was evolving extremely quickly and other technologies were becoming available on a regular basis;

- that three telephone exchanges in Denbighshire were yet to be upgraded to deliver superfast fibre optic broadband, these were Llanarmon-yn-Iâl, Llandegla and Nantglyn, all of whom were due to be enabled by June 2016. This work was on target to be delivered. More information would be available on the website nearer the time;
- that BT could identify which premises would not be able to benefit from either the FTTC or the FTTP service, as well as which were classed at 'not-spots';
- that the 95% figure for premises who could, if they applied for it, access the superfast fibre optic broadband would be located within 3km of their nearest enabled 'green cabinet'. Others located further away than 3km may realise some benefit following the completion of the Programme's roll-out, nevertheless some 5% of premises across the county may not realise any benefits from the programme;
- that in response to concerns about the extent of the roll-out in the Rhuddlan and Bodelwyddan areas, they would check on the latest information and report back to Members via officers;
- that there was no priority given to businesses over residential properties under the Superfast Cymru Programme, apart from those businesses located in enterprise or growth zones of which there were none in Denbighshire;
- that they were aware that the agricultural industry, the mainstay of rural communities, was now heavily reliant on good, reliable IT infrastructure and connectivity, therefore the programme was being rolled-out to both urban and rural communities at the same time;
- that BT would deliver fibre optic broadband infrastructure to new housing developments of over 200 properties at no extra cost to the developer, and would be willing to work with developers of smaller developments to install it on those developments on a shared cost basis. However, it was imperative that developers of all potential sites gave sufficient notice to BT of their plans to develop sites;
- that they would be willing to work with the Council, post the 2017 delivery of this specific programme, to explore areas for improvement with a view to supporting the local economy and developing it further for the future;
- that WG had set itself a target of realising 96% superfast fibre optic broadband coverage across Wales, for both commercial and residential premises – this target figure included fibre optic provided by all providers e.g. Virgin etc. It had tasked BT to deliver superfast fibre optic broadband to 95% of the 'intervention area' – the area designated in 2011 that commercial providers were unlikely to invest in by 2017;
- that WG had acknowledged that 4% of Wales would not be able to access fibre optic broadband by 2017 and that 5% of the 'intervention area' would also be unable to access the service. At the end of this contract period an open market review would be undertaken;
- that residents and businesses could check if the fibre optic service was available in their area by using the 'Broadband Checker' function on the BT Superfast Cymru website. This checker could also be used as a guide for 'downloading' and 'uploading' speeds should the individual or business opt for fibre optic provision;

- that they acknowledged that there was a margin of error associated with using a postcode search facility as not all premises within postcode areas would be able to benefit from the fibre optic service;
- that the pan-Wales figures on the number of premises eligible for fibre optic should be treated with caution, as they may indicate that Denbighshire had a lower number (actual and percentage) of eligible premises than a number of other local authorities. The reason for this was that other counties' figures may include large commercial roll-outs in that county, something that Denbighshire did not have. The only areas in Denbighshire to benefit from a commercial fibre optic service was the Rhyl and Prestatyn area, there was also a high speed fibre network servicing St. Asaph Business Park. Denbighshire was likely to have a larger FTTP roll-out than these other counties, once these individual roll-outs were complete Denbighshire's overall total of eligible premises would increase;
- that whilst a location map for 'green cabinets' was available this could not be shared with outside organisations or individuals as it was classified as 'national security' type information;
- that the take-up rate to date of superfast fibre optic broadband in areas of Denbighshire where 'green cabinets' were live was estimated to be in the region of 25%. It was anticipated that this would rise to circa 40% by mid-2017. Interestingly take-up rates in rural areas were by far exceeding those in more urban areas at present;
- the reasons why some people were not taking up superfast fibre optic broadband at present varied i.e. some people thought you were automatically connected to the service, lack of IT skills, costs were prohibitive for some perhaps whilst other were perfectly happy with the speed of their current service etc.;
- with respect to the Bodelwyddan Local Development Plan (LDP) development the developer would in due course be expected to contact a communications provider regarding installation of superfast fibre optic provision. It would not be appropriate for BT to approach the developer as they may wish to opt for an alternative provider;
- that since the Superfast Cymru Programme had been started an additional 50,000 premises had been added to the work programme, hence the reason that the programme had been extended to 2017;
- that it was widely acknowledged that connectivity was an integral part of day to day life in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, data transfer speed of 20Mbps (megabytes per second) was more than sufficient for a household. The closer the premises was to the 'green cabinet' the higher the data transfer speed, it could be as high as 80Mbps. Data transfer speed would be lost the further away from the green cabinet the property was located i.e. over 3km from the green cabinet the transfer speed could potentially reduce to 10Mbps. The condition of internal wiring in premises could also compromise data transfer speeds, as could wireless connection;
- it was anticipated that by the time the rollout was completed that 95% of Denbighshire premises would have access to superfast broadband if they wished to take it up, and they could expect to receive an average data transfer speed of circa 24Mbps;
- that the WG had a Business Exploitation Team which offered free IT infrastructure reviews to businesses;

- that BT had recently signed a sponsorship deal with the Welsh Rugby Union (WRU), as part of this deal they were looking at how they could utilise the WRU to promote products etc., including specific 'green cabinet' go-live dates;
- the message on the Superfast Cymru Broadband Checker website was currently in the process of being amended with a view to encouraging residents who were known to live in 'not spots' to explore potential alternative solutions;
- that the situation with the roll-out of the remainder of the programme still remained fluid. However, as scheduled 'go-live' dates came nearer they would be in a better position to determine whether any delays could be experienced;
- that it was a bit early as yet to surmise what effect BT's recent acquisition of EE mobile provider would have on future broadband, 4G mobile coverage or not spot areas in the county;

The Chair read out e-mails received from residents who were concerned about the perceived lack of progress, and confusing communications being published, with respect to the Superfast Cymru Roll-out Programme in the Pentrecelyn and Carrog areas. BT representatives advised that there may be some confusion in relation to 'exchange go-live' dates and 'green cabinet go-live dates'. Also if ducts were being installed this would indicate that any actual go-live date would be some two to three months in the future. Delays were also being encountered as when engineers accessed ducts to install the fibre optic cabling they were coming across some that had not been opened for years and had consequently collapsed. These had to be repaired before any installation work could commence, therefore delays occurred. BT representatives requested a copy of the Carrog enquiry to enable further enquiries to be made.

BT representatives undertook to provide a map detailing the commercial and 'intervention' areas in Denbighshire, identifying those areas enabled to date, those planned for the remainder of the programme, and details of known 'not spots' along with details of fibre optic take-up across the county. They also agreed to enquire with WG and the UK Government on whether more could be done to ensure that developers include telephony/fibre optic installation plans with their utilities plans when planning development sites.

Members encouraged BT to share all available information with Elected Members, farming unions and business representatives with a view to increasing take-up of the superfast fibre optic broadband provision. They also requested that the Economic and Community Ambition (ECA) Board/Planning Department flag up the need for the developer of the Bodelwyddan site to make the necessary arrangements for superfast fibre optic provision to be installed to the site.

Members and officers confirmed their willingness to work with BT to promote the availability of Superfast Broadband to businesses, organisations and communities in Denbighshire. They also undertook to write to the Welsh Government to seek them to share the joint BT/WG map on the progress of superfast fibre optic provision in Denbighshire and known 'not-spots' with the Council and with stakeholders with a view to increasing take-up and assisting those residents who cannot benefit from the programme to seek alternative solutions.

At the conclusion of the discussion the Chair thanked BT's representatives for attending and answering Members' questions. It was:

**RESOLVED** – *subject to the above observations, and progression of the identified actions, to receive the presentation.*

## **6 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME**

A copy of a report by the Scrutiny Coordinator (SC), which requested the Committee to review and agree its Forward Work Programme and provided an update on relevant issues, had been circulated with the papers for the meeting.

A copy of the 'Member's Proposal Form' had been included in Appendix 2, Cabinet Forward Work Programme at Appendix 3, and a table summarising recent Committee resolutions and advising on progress with their implementation was attached at Appendix 4.

The SC explained that the Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs Group had met on the 21<sup>st</sup> April, 2016 and it had been agreed that the Performance Scrutiny Committee be requested to include the following items in its forward work programme:-

- Performance in Re-letting of Council Houses - July, 2016.
- Procurement Strategy and Revised Contract Procedure Rules – December, 2016

The Committee considered its draft Forward Work Programme for future meetings, Appendix 1, and the following amendments and additions were agreed:-

**9<sup>th</sup> June, 2016:** The Committee agreed that Lead Members Councillors R.L. Feeley, H.C. Irving and J. Thompson-Hill be invited to attend the meeting.

Appointment of Vice-Chair:- It was explained that the Constitution stated that candidates for the role of Vice-Chair were required to provide a written statement of how they meet the requirements in the role description, Appendix 5, and how they envisaged the Committee operating. As the Committee's next meeting was scheduled for the 9<sup>th</sup> June, 2016, after Annual Council, the Committee would be asked to appoint a Vice-Chair for the remainder of the Council term at that meeting. Committee Members wishing to be considered for the role were requested to forward their statements/CVs to the SC by the 1<sup>st</sup> June, 2016.

In response to concerns raised by Councillor G. Lloyd-Williams, the Chief Executive and Scrutiny Coordinator provided clarification regarding the resolution agreed by the Performance Scrutiny Committee, at the special meeting of the Committee held on the 12<sup>th</sup> April, 2016, in respect of the business item pertaining to In-house Care Services Review and Consultation. Members were informed that the recommendations made by the Scrutiny Committee would be presented to Cabinet for consideration.

**RESOLVED** – *that, subject to the above amendments and agreements, the Work Programme as set out in Appendix 1 to the report be approved.*

## **7 FEEDBACK FROM COMMITTEE REPRESENTATIVES**

Councillor A. Roberts explained that he had attended a meeting of the Schools Standards Monitoring Group (SSMG) where discussions had taken place with representatives from Ysgol Bodfari, Ysgol Gellifor and Ysgol Bryn Clwyd, Llandyrnog. Councillor Roberts stated that officers were currently monitoring the situation at Ysgol Gellifor and Ysgol Bryn Clwyd, Llandyrnog as both schools currently shared the services of a temporary Headteacher.

**RESOLVED** – *that the report be received and noted.*

Meeting ended at 12.20 p.m.