

Committee: Scrutiny Committee

Agenda Item

Date: 26th November 2013

10

Title: Rural Broadband

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Item for decision

Summary

1. At the scrutiny meeting on 3rd September 2013 Members considered a scoping report on rural broadband. This report responds to the questions raised in that scoping document.

Recommendations

2. This report recommends:
 - a. Officers continue to monitor the progress of the wireless service provided by Buzcom in the District
 - b. Officers continue to work closely with the Broadband Delivery UK (BDUK) Superfast Essex programme

Financial Implications

3. Recommendations have costs but these are already budgeted*.

* A grant of £30,000 was given to Buzcom from the 2009/10 Local Authority Business Growth Initiative monies, which are held in the Business Development Reserve, as follows:

- a. £15,000 on go live - paid in September 2011
- b. £5,000 when the lease for use of High Garrett Police Tower is signed
- c. £10,000 when the company can demonstrate they have achieved a minimum of 40 installations per week for a continuous period of 8 weeks

Background Papers

4. The following papers were referred to by the author in the preparation of this report and are available for inspection from the author of the report.
 - a. Report to Environment Committee, Radio Broadband, 17th March 2011
 - b. Uttlesford Economic Development Strategy 2012-14

Impact

- 5.

Communication/Consultation	Consultation on superfast broadband undertaken as part of the Uttlesford Economic Development Strategy during September 2012 including a Business Conference.
Community Safety	None
Equalities	None
Health and Safety	None
Human Rights/Legal Implications	None
Sustainability	Enabling sustainable economic growth in rural areas.
Ward-specific impacts	None
Workforce/Workplace	None

Situation

6. At the scrutiny meeting on 3rd September 2013 Members considered a scoping report on rural broadband that posed a number of questions. These questions and the responses to them are set out below.

- 6.1 What is the current situation within the District regarding wireless broadband availability? What areas of the District are still without broadband?

Currently approximately 70% of the District can receive wireless broadband. This is a theoretical coverage figure as the end users' ability to access the service depends on there being line of site between Buzcom transmission equipment and the customer.

Areas along the eastern side of the District are still unable to access wireless broadband due to delays in acquiring a lease at High Garrett tower that will serve this area.

The most up to date coverage maps will be presented to Members at the committee meeting.

- 6.2 Has Buzcom been launched to all areas? What is the timetable of roll out?

The Buzcom wireless broadband service was communicated to all areas in the District in 2011. However, the delay in making the service available to all areas has created waiting lists.

Buzcom anticipate that the roll out of the main towers will be completed with the High Garrett tower in early 2014.

6.3 How many masts cover Uttlesford and are there plans to bring others online to enhance the coverage

The original plan was for coverage to be provided across the District using four main towers at Cutlers Green and Wimbish Water Tower, RAF Barkway near Royston and the Kent Police tower at High Garrett.

Up to October 2013 two of the main towers are operational at Cutlers Green and Wimbish Water Tower supported by additional towers at High Trees Packers and Poplars in The Rodings.

In October Buzcom signed a ten year renewable agreement to use the tower at RAF Barkway and this is now also operational.

Negotiations are ongoing with Telemaster, the agents for Kent Police with regard to the tower at High Garrett. Investigations are also underway with regard to using Felsted water tower.

6.4 How do regional booster units work?

There are 12 local repeater sites in the District that enhance coverage in the local surrounding area and are sited on farm buildings/barns. The repeater sites enable customers who, for example, do not have line of sight with one of the main towers to receive the signal from a local repeater site that they do have line of sight with.

6.5 Was Buzcom promoted, has information on Buzcom been provided to the community especially the isolated areas?

Buzcom promotes its service predominantly via its website, publicity in local press, presentations (including parish councils) and word of mouth.

6.6 What was the take up, has there been any issues with the system since the launch? What can be done to improve on any issues?

In the District there are currently 710 subscribers, both companies and households, to the Buzcom service. Buzcom has provided access to super fast broadband for a number of rural based businesses.

One example of a rural based business is Miles Kelly Publishing who are an independent children's book publisher based in Thaxted. Founded in 1996 by Jim Miles and Gerard Kelly they employ over 30 people. The company produces books and ebooks for children of all ages. Buzcom were able to provide the company with an uncontended wireless leased line for half the cost proposed by another supplier.

To date, feedback regarding the wireless system Buzcom uses is positive and is proving technically robust. Any issues have related to customers experiencing power outages outside the control of Buzcom.

6.7 What has the feedback been?

Feedback regarding the installation of the equipment and the service provided has been positive. Criticism has been made regarding a lack of communication from Buzcom regarding the waiting list of people and businesses who have registered an interest in receiving the service. To reduce the waiting list Buzcom has increased the number of people installing the equipment from 6 to 9 installers.

Buzcom are currently undergoing trials with Carver Barracks to provide a broadband service for the servicemen and women at the barracks and have received positive feedback.

6.8 Have the proposed savings through the cancellation of broadband contracts been made?

Not as yet. The cancellation of broadband contracts will be looked into when Buzcom had cleared its waiting lists.

6.9 Has free internet access been provided within sheltered units and if so how has this been promoted?

Not as yet. But will be when Buzcom had cleared its waiting lists.

6.10 Has Buzcom been able to sub contract installation and support work to Uttlesford based companies?

Buzcom has used its existing Essex based contractors none of which are in the District.

6.11 What does the Essex County Council rural broadband project involve?

The Essex County Council BDUK "Superfast Essex" project aims to:

- a. By 2015, ensure everyone will get access to basic, 2Megabits per second (Mbps), broadband – this basic level of speed allows one computer or device in a household to access the internet, carry out on-line services and tasks; banking, road fund licence renewal etc. and will allow streaming of videos and other on-line content.
- b. By 2015, at least 90% of Essex will gain access to Superfast broadband. Superfast broadband allows several users to be on-line simultaneously, downloading content, playing games or researching schoolwork.

Currently in Essex, about 60% of premises have access to Superfast Broadband. In cities and towns it is commonplace. In more remote places like smaller towns, villages and hamlets, it currently isn't and it is in these areas that the majority of the investment will be made.

The 'Implementation Stage' of the project is scheduled to commence April 2014. The Essex BDUK Project has been awarded to BT to implement superfast broadband infrastructure (minimum 24Mbps) and better broadband uplift (2Mbps – 24Mbps) to Greater Essex.

6.12 How does the Buzcom offering compliment/compete with the Essex County Council led rural broadband project?

The Buzcom service compliments the Superfast Essex project because it provides superfast broadband now into rural areas that may take up to 2/3 years for the Superfast Essex project to reach. The Buzcom service provides additional competition for the other main private sector providers such as BT Infinity and Virgin and choice for the end user.

Risk Analysis

6. In addition to the risks identified in the report to the Environment Committee, Radio Broadband, 17th March 2011

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigating actions
Buzcom failing to deliver the wireless broadband service across the District	2 Negotiations have been ongoing for over two years regarding the High Garrett tower	2 The service along the east of the District would be compromised	Officers ensure close monitoring of Buzcom

1 = Little or no risk or impact

2 = Some risk or impact – action may be necessary.

3 = Significant risk or impact – action required

4 = Near certainty of risk occurring, catastrophic effect or failure of project.