

**Committee: Scrutiny Committee**

**Agenda Item**

**Date: 7 October 2014**

**9**

**Title: Rural Broadband**

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Item for decision

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## **Summary**

1. At the scrutiny committee meeting on 26 November 2013 Members considered a report on rural broadband. This report updates members on progress.

## **Recommendations**

2. This report recommends:
  - a. Officers continue to monitor the progress of the wireless superfast broadband service provided by Buzcom in the District
  - b. Officers continue to work closely with the Broadband Delivery UK (BDUK) Superfast Essex programme
  - c. Officers continue to implement the District Council's Strategic Initiatives Fund investment in the further roll out of superfast broadband within Uttlesford

## **Financial Implications**

3. Recommendations have costs but these are already budgeted as follows:

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 going 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

At its meeting held on 25 June 2014 Cabinet approved a budget of £100,000 to invest in the further roll out of superfast broadband across the district

## **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, 17 March 2011
- b. Uttlesford Economic Development Strategy 2014-16
- c. Report to Cabinet, Strategic Initiatives Fund, 25 June 2014

## Impact

5.

Communication/Consultation	Consultation on superfast broadband undertaken as part of the Uttlesford 2014-16 Economic Development .
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 committee meeting on 26 November 2013 Members considered a report that responded to a number of questions on rural broadband and this report updates members on progress.

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

It remains that some areas along the eastern side of the District in particular are still unable to access wireless broadband due to continuing delays in acquiring a lease at High Garrett tower that will enable Buzcom to serve this area.

6.2 Has Buzcom been launched to all areas?

A waiting list remains of those people requiring access to superfast broadband in areas where the Buzcom service is not currently available.

Where there has been a request received from business customers in these areas Buzcom has been successful in providing access for a number of these utilising local repeater sites.

An example of where Buzcom has been successful in providing a superfast broadband service is Carver Barracks. The Barracks is a British Army base near Saffron Walden and home to 33 Engineer Regiment (EOD), 101 (City of London) Engineer Regiment (Explosive Ordnance Disposal), Headquarters Essex Wing, Air Training Corps and Saffron Walden Detachment, B Company, and Essex Army Cadet Force.

The soldiers and their families in and around the Barracks had suffered for years with inadequate communications due to poor broadband speeds and non-existent mobile phone signals.

Early in 2013 the Council called a meeting at the Barracks attended by Buzcom and Superfast Essex. Over the following twelve months Buzcom installed its high speed radio broadband equipment across the site resulting in soldiers being able to dispense with their slow copper phone line broadband which was giving them speeds of less than 2Mb/s at cost of more than £30 a month, and they are now able to connect to Buzcom for just £12 a month on a 30 day contract with just a £40 set up fee.

The network has transformed the life of the soldiers, in the past they would need to hang out of a window in order to receive a mobile phone signal, now they can connect in common and private areas.

Major A S MacGill, Second in Command 33 Engineer Regiment (EOD) Carver Barracks commented, "We have 4 Buzcom Wifi Hotspots within Carver Barracks and they have proved to be exceptionally good. The capacity has seen us get well above 12 Mbps and up to 20 Mbps. Other companies could only offer 1-3 Mbps. The cost is exceptionally affordable and on balance it was deemed a very competitive and affordable solution."

As of September 2014 there are forty individual users at the Barracks plus hundreds of users per week of the hotspots installed by Buzcom.

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

Negotiations concerning the remaining tower at High Garrett are ongoing and may not ultimately be successful.

6.4 What is 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 in excess of 900 subscribers, both companies and households, to the Buzcom service.

Feedback regarding the service Buzcom provides is positive and is proving technically robust.

6.5 Have the proposed savings through the cancelation of broadband contracts been made?

The cancellation of broadband contracts will be looked into when Buzcom has cleared its waiting lists.

6.6 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.

6.7 What is the progress concerning The Essex County Council BDUK "Superfast Essex" project?

Essex County Council is rolling out a fibre based Superfast Broadband service across the county, working in partnership with British Telecom. This project is estimated to take a couple more years to complete. It is anticipated that at the end of the project 90% of Essex residents will have access to the fibre based service through providers such as BT Infinity and Virgin.

In order to cover as much of the remaining 10% as possible Superfast Essex through its Broadband Extension project are issuing a tender to seek a partner to utilise innovative technology to achieve an appropriate combination of affordable infrastructure deployment cost and widespread coverage.

In summary,

- a. By 2015, everyone in Essex 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.

6.8 How does the Council's £100,000 investment in superfast broadband and Buzcom's service compliment/compete with the Superfast Essex project?

The Council's investment and the Buzcom service compliment the Superfast Essex project because they provide superfast broadband now or can do so quickly into rural areas that may take up to 2/3 years for the Superfast Essex project to reach.

In addition, whoever the Council contracts with using its £100,000 investment and the Buzcom service will both provide additional competition for the other main private sector providers such as BT Infinity and Virgin and therefore provide more choice for the end user.

## Risk Analysis

7. In addition to the risks identified in the report to the Environment Committee, Radio Broadband, 17 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.