

TORRIDGE DISTRICT COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY (EXTERNAL) COMMITTEE

Riverbank House, Bideford

3 April 2013 at 6pm

PRESENT: Councillor P Pennington (Chair)
Councillors: A Eastman, D Fulford. M Langmead (substituting for B. Edwards)
and B Redwood.

Non Elected Representatives: Dr D McLellan, Mr A Rayner and Mr L Wrey

ALSO PRESENT: J Wallace Head of Paid Service
M Harris Community Development Officer
J Walter Corporate Services Manager
S Squire Democratic Support Officer

Mr Paul Coles (B.T.)
Mr Gary Smith (Transform)

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

79. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors M Brown, D Brenton, B Edwards and J Whittaker.

The Chair advised of a proposed change in the Agenda order. The Committee agreed that Agenda items 6 and 7 be brought forward and presented prior to Agenda item 2.

80. BROADBAND

Mr Paul Coles gave a presentation and update on BT superfast broadband in the Torridge area. He advised that BT were ahead of targets and that two-thirds of UK residents will have access to updated broadband by March 2014.

There was general discussion regarding the number of different companies (including BT) who can compete to provide broadband services and how these companies may market themselves to the public.

Mr Coles advised that there are currently five different locations where BT is having difficulty providing the new broadband services. Two of the locations which provide for approximately 500 properties, are in Bridgeland Street and Market Street, Bideford. It had not been possible to find a location for the new cabinets needed to supply the Broadband services in these locations. Members suggested that a joint site visit with an Officer from TDC Planning Department could help resolve the issue at these locations. Mr Coles added that the new cabinets need to have a mains power supply.

The funding for the new improved broadband services was discussed. Mr Coles clarified that part of the funding was from 'dcms' – the Department for Culture, Media & Sport and part of the funding was from BT. He advised that there was no EU funding for this.

Mr Coles informed the Committee that everyone should register on <http://www.superfast-openreach.co.uk/where-and-when/> as this information is fed back to BT and it also informs residents when improved broadband will be available based on their postcode details.

Mr Coles thanked TDC for being proactive and supporting them in the introduction of superfast broadband in the Torridge area.

The Chair thanked Mr Coles for his interesting and informative presentation and asked if he could return and provide a further update to the Committee at a future meeting. The Corporate Services Manager offered to liaise with Mr Coles in about two or three months' time to agree a date.

The Chair opened the meeting to a question and answer session which included:

- Councillor Redwood asked if details from previous registers had been carried forward to this survey and also how this survey differed from previous ones carried out by BT.
 - Mr Coles replied that previous registers had been carried out to prove demand and justify funding and that the new register had a separate purpose in providing residents with broadband information and informing BT of demand.
- Councillor Redwood expressed disappointment that originally it had been stated 80% of residents would receive superfast broadband with the remaining 20% receiving 4 megabits supply. However the 4 megabits had been reduced to 2 megabits.
 - Mr Coles replied that the new service was providing an up-lift in broadband services to all residents and with technological advancements he expected up to 91% of residents would now receive superfast broadband.
- Councillor Eastman asked if the 1,000 ex-military staff employed by BT to work on the project were on permanent contracts.
 - Mr Coles confirmed that these were permanent members of staff. He further advised that it was predicted a large number of personnel were due to leave the military in the next few years and BT planned to give a number of them employment opportunities.
- Councillor Redwood suggested that a press release be issued by TDC advising residents to register on the BT website and advise of the advancements with superfast broadband.
 - Mr Coles suggested that it may be a good time to issue the press release just as a service goes live.

Mr Coles informed the Committee that BT had recently signed a partnership with Cornwall NHS and County Council as a Centre of Excellence for Telehealth and Telecare.

The Chair asked if there had been any improvement in GVA (gross value added) and if there was any evidence of increased incomes in the area. Mr Coles replied that the BT Programme team estimate that it will generate an additional £750m in GVA by 2020; creating high tech jobs and attracting new businesses and investors to the area. The Chair added that he was particularly interested in any improvements to GVA in rural areas. Mr Coles offered to forward an Economic Impact Report to the Corporate Services Manager.