

## Montgomeryshire Broadband Summit – Newtown 17<sup>th</sup> July 2017

Attendees – see attached

Notes taken by LP Stanton Clerk Manafon Community Council

### **1. Welcome and introductions by Russell George AM**

Introductions of other members addressing meeting; Julie James AM Minister for Skills & Science which includes digital infrastructure, including broadband and mobile; Ed Hunt BT Director BT Superfast Cymru Project; Peter Williams IT support at AM on JJ's team.

RG regards broadband as a necessity these days not a luxury and it is regarded as another utility.

Update from RG: - 74% of Powys has access to Superfast broadband and there has been in improvement over last 2 years, topography and low populated areas does add to the problem of rolling out.

Communication has been a big issue with BT and has been poor particularly with goal posts changing and scepticism of the public, RG stated that it was critical the assembly and BT sought an improvement and BT improved communications.

RG made it clear that the forum was not to address individual circumstances; invites had been to community representatives and business representatives. The main topic of the meeting was what the next steps are; RG and BT are well aware of the issues they don't need to be convinced on that score.

### **2. Summary of points discussed**

**Contract background** - Original contract with BT for Superfast Cymru was 2013, could be no market intervention so BT was only allowed to go where the ISP providers were not established, so if a broadband provider was already established there could be no intervention, for example even Swansea city centre does not have SF broadband. Commercial providers were only interested in serving the densely populated areas and largely the SF Cymru project was largely for rural areas all of Wales.

The contract with BT is that they have until end of December 2017 to complete the project or they don't get paid remainder of contract [presumably].

Contract covered 698,00 premises, BT only being paid when premises enabled, achieving in excess of 30 MBS and after a verification process, in some areas there was a 'shadow' around the speed being achieved so some money was paid on speeds of between 24 and 30 MBS. So it is estimated some 750,000 properties could be connected, some receiving 75-84 MBS.

Investment has been £13.92 million spent in Powys with 74.2% coverage. Take up of SF new technology in Powys has been poor, estimated only 29.68% the lowest take up in Wales. Part of the contract is that BT have to pay back to the Assembly a 'gain share' payment for anything over a 21% take up, that money is then reinvested in the scheme so the more take up the more there is to reinvest.

Once this contract ends there will be renegotiation and currently there is a consultation for the **next 2 weeks** focusing on those premises still not receiving SF, the public consultation is available by following this link to the Welsh Government website:

<https://consultations.gov.wales/consultations/next-generation-access-broadband>

There is a pot of £80 million for that project and as the cost per premise is known it is estimated only 50% of the remaining properties may not be enabled, that is why it is imperative the take up rate is improved to generate more funding and the community as a whole is encouraged to take up the opportunity.

Businesses need to decide what they want too, particularly in terms of speed, for example a caravan park with 110 caravans at 30 MBS, only 10-15 users would be able to connect on that level of bandwidth.

Peter Williams has responsibility for a team of advisors to help people establish what their needs are in terms of download speeds which are the main focus but even upload speeds would not always be sufficient for some business.

There is no agenda or made up plan for this second stage, they can help with the decision process for example with larger communities, can a community hall be suitable for a broadcaster Wi-Fi.

AM Julie James was as frustrated as everyone else by BT and their poor communications, especially with their poor over optimistic forecasts about the enabling of services.

It is important to ascertain who will buy it before they roll out to people don't need it or don't want it, they should be disregarded.

A question raised is - is the take up of SF so poor because it is going to towns (which probably have sufficient broadband speed already) instead of going to where it is needed? BT don't know either where or who it should go to. Villages such as Sarn complained that it has been established in the village but 3 years on still not enabled at premises, JJ again apologised for the delays and reiterated that there is a culture of misinformation within BT and the public can be assured BT are only paid when premises are enabled.

When contract was issued BT and Openreach were one company, there is a split now and BT have the contract but Openreach are the engineering arm of the contract/project, this is a nuisance to the Assembly as there is less control over the contract because of the split.

Had been questions about other ISP providers having access to sell product, some smaller ISP's were saying they were not able to access as not commercially viable, JJ confirmed that part of the contract is that BT have to allow other ISP's on to the network. If consumers find there are restrictions of this nature they should be flagged up to JJ (contact details - [Correspondence.Julie.James@gov.wales](mailto:Correspondence.Julie.James@gov.wales) or [Julie.james@gov.vo.uk](mailto:Julie.james@gov.vo.uk) ).

JJ made a good point that it was important the public had a clear understanding of what package they needed because the less you pay the less priority (service) you will get, the Assembly are in discussion with Ofcom and trading standards as some of the current advertising is misleading in terms of download speeds for Superfast that are achievable versus that being marketed.

You can get advice as a business or an individual about what your needs might be in terms of a package to suit and JJ reiterated that it was imperative for the public to take up SF before the end of December, you won't lose it but take up is essential for ongoing development. In defence of the contract JJ stated that it was an all Wales contract and down to BT to implement, the government got more premises for the money so on one hand better value for the public purse however, it could be said that BT "took the low hanging fruit" for the first 2 years and maybe should have started with the more difficult areas first, they are on target overall to achieve the numbers by end of December so cannot pressure but JJ assured the floor that the next contract would be implemented differently.

Current consultation, some attendees had seen the consultation said it was one of the most difficult of any consultation and needs simplifying, JJ acknowledged this was the case.

Other points raised by attendees, current infrastructure to rural areas in particular i.e. telephone lines were of poor quality and this affects quality of broadband delivery.

Who is controlling BT, they got the money so can do what they like, no controlled plan to say who gets SF next. If the Government are in charge who is managing it?

A lecturer in health care made the point that there is a strain on services with an ageing population and more and more monitoring/health care was/can be done on line however, the people that need access to this support are unlikely to be those that buy in to SF broadband so, in the next contract Government should consider how they can engage with the public to use and support public services online. JJ stated public services are looking at how service can be rolled out as has to go to premises for health monitoring to take place.

JJ stated that there is a question about the future of wireless schemes in rural areas and alternatives, for example investigations going on to establish trunking for main roads and railways, Government had to have better management systems in place to monitor and get prioritise for future schemes.

For the next stage of the contract after 2017 £80 million is earmarked for investment and is expected to do half of what is left go enable, till 2023 it will be funded by the gain share element referred to earlier, thereafter is a ?

Capacity issues are being experienced on some lines, people taking up SF have reported issues and it begs the question why build to 21% plus and then face having to put more capacity in.

On BT web site people asked what does "in scope" mean? Another example of BT and poor communication.

Floor asked why were BT and AM not on the platform at the same time, seems to be a blame culture, it was said that JJ had another appointment and therefore specific times had been allocated to speakers.

Powys have one of the best FTP builds for SF broadband with majority of premises enabled so far having fibre to the premise, no charges for take up except router and cost of your package, only other issues could be for clients who may have phone lines underground.

Some ISP's are saying they cannot provide SF when they can, their decision is based purely on commercial viability for them as a business, it is known that Sky and TalkTalk are not providing fibre to premises.

2 ISP providers were at the meeting, Roy Shelton of ITS Tech, 2,000 premises supplied thus far, specialise in business and caravan parks in particular. Office in Welshpool, link to contact

<http://www.itstechnologygroup.com/contact-us/get-touch/>

Roy Evans of Voneous Ltd specialising in rural areas for broadband not reliant on fibre. Link to contact

<http://www.voneus.com/>

BT Joined meeting at this point, Ed Hunt BT Director BT Superfast Cymru. First question asked is how can we get accurate information and why do goal posts keep shifting? etc., but everyone has to realise that this project was one of the biggest communications engineering projects ever undertaken.

Ed Hunt said that there had only been a 30% take up and many of those premises where it was enabled weren't using it.....

Floor was asked not to air individual frustrations at BT as he admitted that they were well documented and doesn't disagree with the critic on BT's communications, he said the scale of the engineering had been very challenging, estimating completion dates is tough and for various reasons will move several times for some areas.

The contract not the fault of Welsh Government it was a numbers contract and was for enabling anywhere across Wales, not specified areas.

There is a meeting with AM Tuesday to say where they are and pressure is on as the deadline is close. He was available for one to ones after meeting closed.

Further points raised from the floor – Where can you go to get a direct answer from BT?

Why are there areas with the lines going right past premises from the boxes b but still not enabled?

Community fibre cabinets can be provided by BT, quotes for these can be obtained from BT.

**Mobile infrastructure** was also touched on, a number of attendees brought up the subject of inadequate mobile coverage and this should also be a priority for development. JJ said that the mobile infrastructure for Wales was not a devolved matter and there could only be discussion and negotiation, there have been regular meetings and things have moved forward to the stage that they are nearly at an agreed action plan; this plan was not elaborated on.

Some closing points made:-

There had been issues on the siting of masts, needs to be more research on the impact of multiple masts in rural areas. A question was raised from the floor as to whether or not the modern mobile masts could be utilised for developing or improving broadband to rural areas. JJ confirmed that there was discussion on the future use of the emergency masts after the contract ends in 2018 but there was reluctance within providers to share masts.

Tregynon has planning in for a new mast critical for providing mobile coverage to the team of First Responders, providing and supporting health care in the community, could this not enhance the provisions of fibre broadband?

PW confirmed that the Tetra masts contract was ending 2018 and new technology will be used for the emergency services, Vodaphone, Three and O2 are all active in providing service but people are still raising objections to new masts instead people should be supporting investment in masts if they wanted to get god uninterrupted coverage,

RG was asked who senior in BT could people have access to someone to discuss their specific situations with, anyone who feels the need for this is to contact RG who will discuss with Ed Hunt - Email:

[Russell.George@assembly.wales](mailto:Russell.George@assembly.wales) Tel 01686 610887