

Subject: **Norfolk County Council: Opportunities to extend superfast broadband coverage to be discussed**

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Opportunities to extend superfast broadband coverage to be discussed

Millions of pounds of additional investment could be ploughed into a County Council programme which has already helped to double superfast broadband access in Norfolk since 2013.

Councillors on Norfolk County Council's Digital Innovation and Efficiency Committee will consider two opportunities to extend the Better Broadband for Norfolk (BBfN) Programme at a meeting next Tuesday (6 March) at County Hall.

The first would see £11 million of BBfN contract rebates reinvested back into the programme which would be used to help make superfast (24 Megabits per second and above) broadband available to those properties in Norfolk that are not already in line to receive access to it. The rebates are due to be paid to the council to avoid public money being used to subsidise commercially-viable networks, following higher than expected levels of take-up of the broadband services on BBfN-installed infrastructure to date.

The other opportunity has the potential to bring an additional £2 million into Norfolk with the specific aim of making superfast broadband services available to rural businesses. Officers are proposing to bid for a share of the Department of Environment, Farming and Rural Affairs' (DEFRA's) £30 million Rural Broadband Grant national fund, to be used where there is "a defined business need" and to enable economic growth. If the council does decide to bid for this funding it would be competing against other local authorities and the money will be allocated on a first-come, first-served basis.

Tom Garrod, Chairman of the Digital Innovation and Efficiency Committee, said: "Our Better Broadband for Norfolk programme has already transformed broadband speeds for many people in the county, including in some of our most rural areas. We're on course to increase superfast broadband access in Norfolk to 95 per cent by March 2020 but we need to do more to reach the final five per cent, and we're absolutely committed to getting to 100 per cent coverage as soon as we can.

"Investing an additional £13 million on top of the nearly £70 million already spent or committed to BBfN would help us reach thousands more homes and businesses in Norfolk and get us much closer to our goal of eliminating broadband inequality in the county."

Norfolk County Council's Digital Innovation and Efficiency Committee will meet at 10am on Tuesday, 6 March at County Hall in Norwich. Members of the public are welcome to attend.

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About Better Broadband for Norfolk

Better Broadband for Norfolk (BBfN) is transforming broadband speeds across Norfolk by extending access to a faster, fibre broadband network to homes and businesses across the county. The current programme is a partnership between Norfolk County Council and BT, with funding also provided by Broadband Delivery UK (BDUK) on behalf of central Government, the New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership and five of Norfolk's district councils – Breckland, Broadland, King's Lynn and West Norfolk, North Norfolk and South Norfolk.

Since it launched at the end of 2012, nearly £70 million has been invested in the programme, which is primarily focused on improving broadband access in the more rural parts of the county. BBfN is due to make high-speed broadband available to more than 95 per cent of Norfolk's premises by spring 2020.

The project is already making a difference to people living, working and running businesses in Norfolk. Currently, 90% of the county's premises can access superfast broadband (24 Megabits per second and above), more than double the number who could do so before the project got underway (42%).

For political comment

Cllr Tom Garrod (Conservative) Chairman of the Digital Innovation and Efficiency Committee, on 07515 356821

Cllr David Rowntree (Labour), on 07450 679993

Cllr Marie Strong (Liberal Democrat), on 07920 286597

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