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1. Introduction

- 1.1 This paper reviews actions taken to improve connectivity within Westminster, including broadband and mobile connectivity. The report assesses how the Council has progressed with actions proposed in the report to the Environment Policy and Scrutiny Committee meeting on the 7th March 2016.
- 1.2 When last reported to the Committee, Ofcom data from 2014 showed that only 47% of premises in Westminster had access to superfast broadband, download speed of 24Mbps (the UK definition as opposed to the European definition of 30Mbps). This was the worst coverage of any London borough other than the City of London. Westminster also falls significantly below the London wide average of 95%.¹This data was updated in December 2016 and in 70% of premises, speeds have improved.
- 1.3 A report by M-Com found that the UK lags behind globally in relation to broadband connectivity. Britain's average speed ranking is 31st in the world trailing most of Europe as well as Thailand and New Zealand. The average speed in the UK (16.5Mbps) is one third of the speed experiences within Singapore (55Mbps) which tops the table. In order for the UK and

¹ These figures are compiled from BT, Virgin Media, Sky, Talk Talk, Vodafone, KCOM, Gigaclear, Hyperoptic, IFNL, B4RN and Relish. Not all providers will be represented so the data is incomplete.

Westminster to compete internationally the broadband infrastructure needs to be in place to attract and retain businesses.

- 1.4 A significant challenge for Westminster is that large areas of the City are deemed commercially unviable when searching the Openreach availability checker, which checks to see if superfast broadband is in the area, despite there being clusters of demand from residents. As these are not buildings of multiple occupation, there is a weaker commercial case for other operators to connect these buildings with pure fibre as there is not a high enough return on investment. If there is no intervention these areas may remain poorly served.

2. Westminster's Broadband Campaign

- 2.1 Over the past year, Westminster City Council has been involved in a number of initiatives to support the delivery of improved broadband within the city. This paper explores how effective these interventions have been and highlights what might be achieved through further lobbying, working with partners and by supporting innovation in the market.

- 2.2 Key highlights are as follows:

Openreach Commitment

- 2.3 In October 2015, Openreach committed to roll out a programme of investment to deliver an additional 144 cabinets capable of delivering superfast broadband by the end of 2017. These cabinets would reach an additional 40,000 premises.
- 2.4 To date, 62 cabinets have been upgraded, serving an additional c. 14,500 premises. In order to support this activity, the council's street works team currently host weekly meetings with Openreach's contractors to help remove barriers to deploying cabinets on the streets of Westminster.

Council Housing Stock

- 2.5 Over the past few years, the council has worked closely with a number of broadband infrastructure providers in order to support new digital connectivity in its housing stock, such as Community Fibre and Hyperoptic who partnered with the council on important early pilots.
- 2.6 In 2015, Community Fibre completed a pilot installation of full fibre broadband to 1,142 homes in the Grosvenor Estate area. Building on this pilot with Community Fibre, as the roll out commences across Westminster, the council will ensure a fair and competitive market for high speed services in the city by considering applications from any provider, thus helping to bring high speed broadband to the community as quickly as possible.
- 2.7 Over the last 12 months, the council has approved Community Fibre to connect a further nine estates and 7,577 homes. Hyperoptic have currently submitted proposals for 7 estates and 5,792 homes (pending viability

surveys). With some overlap between providers, these applications have the potential to connect around 35% of the council's housing stock.

- 2.8 The infrastructure deployed above is a full fibre solution and is capable of delivering upload and download speeds of 1Gbps.
- 2.9 As well as providing connectivity to the Council's housing stock, Community Fibre are working with the council to identify scenarios where low cost and / or free connections can be provided to long term unemployed Westminster residents. Hyperoptic are also providing free connectivity to the Community Hall/Centre when installing networks to these locations.

Coordinating Street Works

- 2.10 Westminster's street works team has long recognised its role in supporting network deployment and helping utilities to undertake their work with minimum impact on residents and road-users. While the City Council operates the London Permit Scheme to help control works in the highway, the team have always taken a uniquely pragmatic approach to the implementation of the restrictions within the legislation.
- 2.11 Where many Boroughs strictly impose the various measures within the legislation, the WCC street works team see the legislation as a method to ensure the wider duty to manage the road network effectively, minimise disruption, and protect the highway asset. In practice this means that rather than imposing strict 3 month notice periods for new major works in all cases, officers may agree an earlier start where there is limited impact on the network or even an opportunity to phase the works with reduced disruption. This usually means that companies delivering fibre within Westminster can get access to the highway more flexibly and more promptly than they would elsewhere.
- 2.12 Officers have taken a proactive approach with broadband providers. New companies starting work in the borough are invited in to meet the team. This helps build relationships and introduce all the necessary key contacts. Early meeting also helps mutual understanding and sets the council's expectations so the contractors understand how they will be expected to meet shared objectives. Larger companies are met regularly to help smooth problems before they arise. Openreach has weekly meetings with street works officers where future plans for connections are reviewed. This enables works to be co-ordinated and customer engagement improved.
- 2.13 While the council always seeks opportunity for utilities to work together, to support the more effective roll-out of fibre networks the council is looking to encourage closer working with its own maintenance contractors when it comes to schemes or resurfacing. The goal is to support work taking place alongside or in advance of the council's works. This has the benefit of ensuring a higher quality highway appearance and potentially reducing the disruption from having uncoordinated activity. Residents and businesses should benefit from less disruption and increased access to services.

Undertaken correctly, joint working on street has the potential to share costs for both the council and the fibre providers.

Connect Westminster

- 2.14 In May 2017, Westminster City Council secured £2.8m ERDF funding to deliver a connection voucher scheme to support small businesses to connect to gigabit capable broadband. The scheme will provide small businesses with up to £2,000 towards the capital cost of their connection reducing a barrier to taking up a fast broadband connection.
- 2.15 The supplier registration process opened on Friday 23rd June and closed on 24th July. The Council received an overwhelming response from suppliers and to date 110 suppliers have registered on the scheme to date. These suppliers can all provide the physical infrastructure including the fibre to buildings. It is important to define these as different from content providers (although some companies offer content as well). For the purposes of Connect Westminster, the aim is to provide a voucher to subsidise the infrastructure. The businesses will then choose their own content supplier on a commercial, non-subsidised basis.
- 2.16 Small businesses within Westminster and the West End Partnership area have been able to apply to the scheme from the 24th August 2017, a supplementary paper will be shared with the committee in advance of the meeting to update on progress made to date. There is £2.5m available for SMEs and the funding will be available on a first come first serve basis or until March 2019.
- 2.17 Through the Connect Westminster Scheme at least 1,250 SMEs will receive access to gigabit capable broadband. It is anticipated that the project will deliver new jobs, additional turnover and reduce cost to the firms that participate.

Parking Bay Discounts

- 2.18 The cost of parking bay suspensions is significant when deploying new networks. To help reduce these costs, applications for suspensions for a programme of works from broadband providers, to lay superfast broadband infrastructure, will be given the same concessions as London Joint Utilities Group 'major works', up to a maximum of 3 months.
- 2.19 The details of the concessions awarded since the 1st June 2017 is as follows:
- 2 providers have made use of the discounts.
 - 121 suspensions have been applied for on 31 different streets.
 - A total of £200k of discounts has been provided.
- 2.20 Early signs suggest this concession has increased the attractiveness of Westminster as a destination to invest in infrastructure.

City Plan

- 2.21 The working draft of Westminster's City Plan, currently scheduled for completion in early 2018, contains specific provisions regarding the improvement of the city's digital connectivity, recognising the need to support business, particularly SMEs, and the digital economy through the provision of effective digital infrastructure.
- 2.22 The draft plan states the council will work closely with digital communications and technology providers to improve the quality of infrastructure and delivery, while ensuring the continued high standards in the city's public realm and build environment.
- 2.23 The council will also seek to encourage new development and infrastructure projects to provide the most up-to-date digital connectivity, whilst allowing for future technological advances, as well as giving building occupiers a choice of providers.
- 2.24 Working with developers and providers, the use of communal entry chambers will be promoted, to facilitate installation of telecommunications services into new commercial developments, alongside a coordinated approach to street works.

Small Cell Concession

- 2.25 Within Westminster there is already extensive 3G coverage delivered by all mobile operators. However due to increasing demands on the network (the amount of data that consumers are accessing and downloading) connectivity can be very slow. Anecdotal as well as empirical evidence suggests this is having an increasing impact on residents, businesses and visitors to City of Westminster.
- 2.26 In the first stage of deployment, the 4G Licence Holders (Mobile Operators) are looking to upgrade existing sites as opposed to building new sites. However, as demand for 4G increases, with the consequential pressures on coverage, capacity and consumer expectations, there will be an increasing requirement for 4G Operators to enhance coverage through the provision of additional rooftop sites or localised street level coverage known as Small Cell. This entails the deployment of 4G wireless hardware on street furniture or buildings to enhance local coverage.
- 2.27 The mobile operators key investment locations are within London. The operators acknowledge the unique demands and problems within the City of Westminster. In order to meet this demand, the council, as an enabler for the delivery of these networks, has the opportunity to use its street based assets.

2.28 As a result, the Council is offering up 11,000 street assets to enable the market to deliver small cell deployments within Westminster. This project will help plug the gaps in 4G connectivity and create the right conditions to deploy 5G networks within the area once these start to emerge. As a technology it is anticipated that 5G will require a densification of cells and this project could act as an enabler for Westminster to be an early adopter of this technology.

2.29 The procurement is currently working to the following timetable:

Activity	Date
Initial Qualification, Technical and Commercial Evaluation	27th June – 17th July 2017
Shortlist Notification	18th July 2017
Shortlisted Suppliers Presentations	1st and 2nd August 2017
Submission of Final Clarifications and best and final offers by Shortlisted Suppliers	16th August 2017 (by 14.00)
Final Evaluation and Scoring	By end of August 2017
Preferred bidder notification	Mid-September 2017
Alcatel Standstill period	End-September 2017
Contract award / negotiation	Mid-October 2017
Anticipated service commencement	1st November 2017

2.30 These activities help reduce the costs of network deployment, stimulate consumer and business demand and simplify the process for building networks within Westminster. This is an important example of how the Council has created the right conditions for the private sector to operate effectively and feel more confident of returns to their investment. The Wired Westminster Group continues to engage with industry

Wired Westminster

2.31 The purpose of Wired Westminster is to get an industry perspective on activities and to get and understand the ground level dynamics and challenges from experts in broadband provision. The group is a source of knowledge which can inform development projects and also better respond to consultations. The expected outcomes of Wired Westminster are that it will enable the council discovering potential new solutions to address the various connectivity barriers (economic and physical) in the capital. With WCC's road management teams and place shaping team directly engaging with service providers, it is expected that some more targeted suggestions and options for broadband and digital infrastructure will crystallise.

3. Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS)

3.1 Later this year the Government is launching the Local Full Fibre Networks Programme, a £200m fund to support locally-led projects across the UK. The Challenge fund will invite local bodies to bid for funding to stimulate investment and activity to create more full fibre connections in their local areas.

- 3.2 Priorities for the fund include harnessing long-term public sector internet demand, providing gigabit connection vouchers to increase business take-up, upgrading connections into public buildings with fibre and improving access to publically-owned infrastructure. These approaches focus on improving the business case for the private sector to invest in fibre networks to connect even more homes and businesses.
- 3.3 The scheme will fund capital projects between 2017/18 to 2020/2. Applications will be sought in autumn 2017. DCMS are looking to fund projects that are consistent with the Council's Digital Connectivity Strategy or other plans setting out the long term vision for connectivity.

4. Greater London Authority (GLA)

- 4.1 The Mayor is exploring three key projects to improve connectivity within London:
- 4.2 Not spot team – The Mayor will shortly be recruiting a pilot 'Not Spot team', which will be deployed to target not spot areas within London boroughs. The Not Spot team would be embedded within a borough for some months to; provide resource and guidance to boroughs, foster relationships with providers, develop best practise, target key areas and share best practise across borough boundaries and elsewhere. The team will work primarily on a location basis but will also operate a number of high level groups to improve connectivity across London.
- 4.3 Mobile wayleave – Building on the work of Central London Forward, the GLA with partners will develop a standardised wayleave for the mobile industry. The standardised wayleaves provide a more neutral starting point for discussions about access and help to facilitate easier and faster installations, particularly when negotiating agreements to access Local Authority property.
- 4.4 Updating London plan guidance for planners – The GLA are developing connectivity guidance documents that will aid planners in making decisions on connectivity projects, and ensuring connectivity is considered with all applications.

5. Digital Plan

- 5.1 Westminster does not currently have a digital strategy, while many other London boroughs already have plans in place, such as Camden and Southwark. Given the attention the availability of broadband, and digital infrastructure more broadly, is receiving from national Government at present, the development of an ambitious long-term and coordinated plan would be beneficial in positioning Westminster as a leading voice in the debate. Westminster has already demonstrated that with its convening power, a great deal can be done in a challenging area, but a digital plan would provide a strong platform to take this further.

5.2 While the provision of funding from the Government's Local Full Fibre Networks Programme is not wholly contingent on having a long term digital strategy, DCMS have made it clear that a long-term digital plan to support a bid for funds will enable them to better understand the context of the project and where their support can best be targeted.

5.3 The guidance issued by DCMS for those interested in bidding for funding states that the existing environment should be understood, to assess the potential success as a result of the funded project. The development of a digital plan would provide a strong platform to better understand the existing environment and how to tackle it.

6. Actions suggested at March 2016 Environment Policy and Scrutiny Committee

Activity	What we have done?
Continue our lobbying activities to raise the profile of urban not-spots with national government and champion the need for London to be an internationally competitive city with regards to broadband speeds and availability to ensure it remains a great place for a business to invest.	Westminster provided a contribution to a London wide response to a DCMS consultation on 'Extending Full Fibre Broadband Networks'. This has informed the Local Full Fibre Networks Programme mentioned in section 3.
Work with broadband providers to host an event to raise awareness amongst the business community of the benefits of superfast broadband.	As part of the Connect Westminster Project, the Council has secured funding to deliver demand stimulation events for the connection voucher scheme. The events will demonstrate the benefits of superfast broadband.
Explore the potential of running a connection voucher scheme through the West End Partnership to help address "not-spot" areas (areas with poor connectivity) in Soho.	The Council has secured £2.8m of ERDF funding to support 1,250 small firms within Westminster and the West End Partnership area to connect to Gigabit capable broadband.
Develop a Standardised Wayleave Agreement for mobile broadband infrastructure through the Wired Westminster Group.	Westminster City Council will work with the GLA on developing the mobile standardised wayleave agreement. The Wired Westminster Group will act as a forum to sense check the agreement from a property and broadband provider perspective.
Continue to explore ways to support broadband providers deliver superfast broadband within Westminster	This year the Council has developed a number of initiatives to support broadband providers to deliver superfast broadband within Westminster. These include; parking

	bay suspensions, adoption of a fixed standardised wayleave agreement, coordination of public realm works and the Connect Westminster project.
Provision of Council owned ducts and infrastructure – as proposed within the West End Partnership delivery programme.	The Council has already achieved success through working with industry to install ducting as part of public realm delivery within the West End. An example of this is a deployment that took place on Bond Street and Berwick Street. Through early engagement with industry, the private sector can deliver ducting infrastructure in line with the Council's major schemes.

7. Conclusion

- 7.1 Although, with strong Council support, connectivity has significantly improved over the last year, from 42% to 70%, superfast availability within Westminster still lags significantly behind the rest of London, at a national level and globally. If Westminster is to remain the best place in the world to start and grow a business, the digital infrastructure needs to keep up with the rest of the world with respect to both availability and speeds.
- 7.2 Over the last year therefore, the Council has developed projects to reduce the cost of deploying infrastructure, improved coordination with industry, stimulated demand and removed barriers to broadband deployment. This programme of activity has created the right conditions for private sector investment. Over the next year there is an opportunity to build on these activities to further improve connectivity within Westminster.
- 7.3 Plans for the year ahead could include:
- Improve mobile connectivity by developing an effective relationships and robust processes to deploy a small cell network working with the successful bidder for the Council's small cell contract.
 - Develop and implement a Digital Plan for Westminster, to provide a platform to assess and tackle remaining obstacles to effective digital connectivity in the city, as well as a long-term strategy to ensure Westminster remains well placed for future digital advancements. More detail on the plan is set out in section 4.
 - Submit a bid to secure funding from the Local Full Fibre Network Programme. This is to create further fibre to premise networks which are faster and demand less maintenance than the current, ubiquitous, fibre to cabinet systems. Fibre to cabinet can mean speed is lost if the fibre from the cabinet is not designed to be superfast. Rolling these out network out

across the UK was a priority included in the UK Autumn Budget Statement.

- Explore the potential of delivering a connection voucher scheme to address poor connectivity within residential areas within Westminster through the Local Full Fibre Network Programme.
- Encourage coordination of work with highway works to ensure fibre infrastructure is installed as part of Council-led works where feasible.
- Successfully deliver the Connect Westminster project.
- Work with the GLA to develop the Standardised Mobile Wayleave. This would be a standard legal agreement between a provider and a landlord. Currently the lack of a standard agreement wastes time and money because it requires greater legal cost.
- As the Council owns a significant housing stock and commissions significant housing resource, it can act to provide permissions and a scale of market that many landlords cannot. It may also prevail on contractors and developers to consider providing gigabit capable broadband in private developments.