

Committee:	Dated:
Community and Children's Services Committee	08/03/2019
Subject: Update on rollout of fibre broadband to City of London housing estates.	Public
Report of: The City Surveyor	For information
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Summary

This report follows on from one sent to the Community and Children's Services (CCS) Committee in February 2017, where Members granted approval for selected fibre broadband providers to install affordable faster broadband services into City of London's 12 housing estates. Following an expression of interest exercise, three fibre broadband operators (Hyperoptic, Community Fibre and Vision Fibre Media) were selected to connect to the housing estates. A health and safety breach by a contractor installing fibre broadband on Avondale Square Estate, and concerns around installation methods and planning issues on Golden Lane Estate have unfortunately presented delays of several months. Works are expected to be completed on Golden Lane Estate by March 2019, with all remaining estates being completed by Quarter 1 (Q1) 2020.

Recommendations:

Members are asked to note:

- i. the contents of this report for information.
- ii. that we will send a further report to Members to update on the progress of the fibre broadband rollout to the City's 12 housing estates in 6 months' time.

Main Report

Background

1. The City of London's (CoL's) 'Gigabit City programme, led by the City Property Advisory Team (CPAT) has sought to improve wired and wireless coverage in the Square Mile for small businesses and residents. In February 2017, the CCS Committee gave approval for the City's outlying housing estates to be included in the Gigabit City programme, to allow the installation of affordable faster broadband (offering speeds up to 1 gigabit per second) to all of the City's 12 housing estates (shown in Appendix 1).

2. In July 2017 CPAT completed an Expression of Interest exercise which resulted in the selection of three fibre broadband operators (Community Fibre, Hyperoptic and Vision Fibre Media) to provide affordable gigabit fibre broadband to CoL's 12 housing estates, which was expected to be completed by the end of 2018.
3. Wayleaves were signed with Community Fibre, Hyperoptic and Vision Fibre Media in March 2018. The wayleave compelled the operators to meet key service obligations, which included the following:
 - That the service is installed, operated and maintained at no cost to the City (including power connections and energy consumption for broadband equipment).
 - No exclusivity is afforded to any provider connecting to the estates.
 - All buildings on each estate will receive faster broadband so that universal coverage and can be offered to all residents (avoiding providers being able to cherry pick' the most densely populated buildings on the estate).
 - All cabling will be installed within existing containment and duct work within the estates.
 - That all providers consent to use the CoL standardised wayleave document.
 - One communal area on each estate (community halls/estate office, etc) will be provided with a 1 gigabit per second WiFi hotspot which will be free to use to all residents.
 - That services are provided over fibre optic cables at various speeds up to 1 gigabit per second at affordable price points, with a low-priced (under £10 per month) no-contract option for tenants on benefits or low incomes.
 - Southwark estates and the Avondale estate will be the first estates to be connected, given that they are the first CoL estates where residents must manage benefits online via the Universal Credit website.

Deployment of fibre broadband

4. While (under the wayleave agreed with CoL), all operators are compelled to ensure provision of faster broadband to all buildings on each estate which they have committed to connecting, not all operators expressed interest in connecting to every estate.
5. Community Fibre and Hyperoptic did commit to installing services to every estate, However Vision Fibre Media only committed to connecting three estates (Golden Lane, Middlesex Street and York Way).

Avondale Square & Southwark Estates

6. Community Fibre and Hyperoptic have now completed the rollout of fibre broadband to Avondale Square Estate. Community Fibre has completed their rollout of Southwark Estates, with Hyperoptic expected to complete by the end of March 2019. Both contractors installed services on the Avondale Square Estates at the same time. It was originally envisaged that all operators would be able to deploy services to estates simultaneously to avoid unfair advantages being given to any of the operators. This has, however, proved challenging in practice, with the estates having to accommodate separate welfare facilities for both operators.

7. A serious health and safety breach by a contractor acting for one of the operators halted works for a temporary period. Subsequent discussions between the operator in question and health and safety staff from Community and Children's Services, City Surveyors and Town Clerks led to assurances being provided that such events would not reoccur.

Golden Lane Estate

8. Community Fibre, Hyperoptic and Vision Fibre Media have committed to installing faster broadband services to Golden Lane Estate, however, following the health and safety breach on Avondale Square Estate, the Housing department expressed concern over three contractors potentially working in the same environment, posing further health and safety risks and potentially causing damage to the existing ducts. Under CDM Regulations 2015 the Golden Lane Estate would have had to accommodate welfare facilities for three separate contractors, which was seen to be unworkable by the Golden Lane Estate Office.
9. Following a meeting with the Housing Department and all three operators in August 2018, it was agreed that a single contractor was required to undertake all installation work on Golden Lane Estate to avoid these risks. The Planning Department also expressed concern that, due to the listed status of the estate, if existing ducts could not be used, it was likely that listed building consent would be required to install new ducting. Further surveys have since showed that, as all three operators will be using fibre optic cables (which are very small in diameter), all works could be undertaken using existing ducts.
10. The three operators have struggled to agree commercial terms with each other to appoint a single contractor, which has caused further delays to the rollout on Golden Lane Estate. However, it has now been agreed that Community Fibre will appoint a contractor to install all of the works on behalf of all three operators, avoiding the need for new ducting or planning and listed building consent. Community Fibre will begin installation on behalf of the other operators on 19 February 2018, and work is expected to last up to five weeks.

Rollout to remaining CoL housing estates

11. Following completion of the Golden Lane Estate, all operators have confirmed that they do not wish to use a single operator to complete their rollout of fibre broadband to the remaining estates.
12. In order to avoid issues experienced to date, it is expected that CPAT and the Housing Department will need to work with the three operators so that they are not working on estates at the same time, and in order to avoid health and safety and other issues. It is therefore unavoidable that each estate will have separate contractors installing fibre optic infrastructure one after the other. However, the gap between operators' works may be several months, and so disruption to residents is likely to be minimal (especially given that the works' duration on some estates is only expected to be two weeks). Surveys have also shown that

the remaining estates have greater duct capacity. It is anticipated that all of the remaining estates will be completed by Q1 2020.

Fire stopping

13. The Housing Department has insisted on the need for photographic evidence to show where fire stopping has been completed in locations where holes have been drilled to facilitate installation. Following completion of the fibre broadband installation, full inspections of the fire stopping will be undertaken to ensure that it has been carried out in accordance with the CoL Fire Stopping Guidance.

Conclusion

14. While it was originally anticipated that connecting the CoL's housing estates to fibre broadband would happen within 12 months, the project has suffered several months delay due to unforeseen barriers to delivery, such as the health and safety breach at Avondale Square Estate and challenges around planning and proposed installation methods to connect the Golden Lane Estate. It is expected that rollout to the remaining estates can be completed by the end of Q1 2019.

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Appendix 1 – City of London housing estates being provided with affordable faster broadband.

- Avondale Square Estate
- Golden Lane Estate
- Holloway Estate
- Horace Jones Hones
- Isleden House
- Southwark Estates
- Sydenham Hill Estates
- Dron House
- Middlesex St Estate
- William Blake Estate
- Windsor House Estate
- York Way Estate