

**COUNTY COUNCILLOR REPORT
TO
ALL PARISH COUNCILS
IN PETERSFIELD HANGERS**

1 SEPTEMBER 2021

1. Project Gigabit update

The pandemic highlighted the importance of broadband to our communities and I feel great sympathy for those who continue to struggle with slow broadband speeds. As working from home is set to commonplace, the importance of good broadband is set to persist. Hampshire County Council does not have any statutory duties relating to broadband and we are not adequately funded for the statutory duties we do have, such as social care and highways. We are allocating scarce resources and staff time to the broadband roll-out because we recognise the importance of broadband to rural communities and to the local economy.

During August we saw some more details emerge from the Government on Project Gigabit which included some good news for East Hampshire. Hampshire is in the second wave of the initial procurements, called “Phase 1b”.

Hampshire and Isle of Wight have been allocated a share of between £148-250 million as part of the Government’s £5 billion investment. The Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) is set to procure contracts for the region’s roll out in February 2022, with delivery expected in 2023. This high spending allocation in Hampshire follows months of intense lobbying by officers and councillors and we are delighted to have got this result for residents.

Many of us in East Hampshire (including me) have speeds of between 10-24 Mbps; this is not considered to be superfast and that is why many of our properties are included in the procurement. We now have the consultation postcode list which shows which properties will fall within the procurement area (N.B. this is subject to consultation but it is not expected to change much). I am awaiting a detailed analysis of this postcode list from the Hampshire Superfast Broadband Team. In the meantime, you may wish to check the postcode spreadsheet which can be found at this link:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1011873/Hampshire IoW OMR Postcode Output.ods](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1011873/Hampshire_IoW_OMR_Postcode_Output.ods)

(N.B. You need to select and sort the postcodes in the first column. If you are not familiar with Excel this may not be straightforward for you.)

Project Gigabit is a procurement project run by DCMS. It is not yet clear what role the County Council will play in this procurement process. DCMS seems to want the County to act as the interface with the public. The terms of how this would work are currently being negotiated.

If you want to read more about the DCMS consultation then the full documentation is all at this link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/uk-gigabit-programme-hampshire-and-isle-of-wight-public-review>

Whilst we await the rollout of Project Gigabit, the process of Community Fibre Partnerships managed by Openreach will continue. This means that many communities in East Hampshire will get fibre to the premises earlier than 2023. The CFPs are still supported by the Government's Rural Gigabit Connectivity Voucher scheme which provides £1,500 per premises as well as the "top-up" provided by Hampshire County Council: also £1,500 per premises. The closing date for the voucher scheme and the top-up scheme is December 2021.

2. Preparing for a safe return to school

For the autumn term, the priority for the County Council in all education settings is to ensure that pupils and students can safely and effectively return to learning in the classroom, in a way that keeps any possible COVID-19 risks to the absolute minimum. It has been an especially challenging 18 months for children and young people and we want their lives to return to normal as much as possible.

You may be interested to note the latest updates to Government COVID-19 guidance about nurseries, schools, colleges and universities summarised below.

- Bubbles are no longer required: Students will no longer be required to form bubbles or limited groups.
- When to wear a face covering has changed: Face coverings are no longer required for pupils and staff in school, which means a return to singing and playing brass instruments in school settings. However, face coverings are still recommended when using public transport to and from school.

- Changes to who needs to self-isolate and when: Under 18s and fully vaccinated adults who are identified as close contacts do not need to self-isolate unless they have COVID-19 symptoms. Close contacts should instead take a PCR test. If positive, NHS Test and Trace will inform the individual what to do next.
- Regular asymptomatic testing at home should continue: Secondary school pupils and college students are encouraged to continue taking Lateral Flow Device tests twice each week. At the start of term, schools will carry out two rapid flow tests on the school premises for each person; after this, tests should continue at home.
- Additional age groups can get vaccinated: Anyone aged 16 or 17 can now get vaccinated. Children aged 12-15 with underlying health conditions or who live with someone that is clinically vulnerable can also be vaccinated.
- Children and young people should stay home if they are at all unwell and not use public transport. Even if they don't have COVID-19 symptoms or their COVID-19 test is negative, they may still have an illness which could be passed on to other people.

In line with Government guidance, each education setting also carries out regular COVID-19 risk assessments and may, as part of their assessment, recommend additional precautionary measures such as staggering school start times. Education settings will advise parents and carers directly if there are any further measures that they need to be aware of for their child.

3. Welcoming Afghan families to Hampshire

Hampshire County Council is pleased to be working with local partners including our District and Borough councils, NHS, support providers and local charities to assist Afghan families moving to the UK to re-settle as part of the Government's Afghan Relocation and Assistance Policy programme.

A number of families have now been welcomed to the county and we are working hard to ensure they have all the local information they need and are made to feel welcome after what has been a very difficult and disorientating period in their lives.

If you wish to donate an item, please visit the website of registered local charity Community First (see link below) who are co-ordinating collections across the county. In addition to signposting to donation points, Community First has also published a list of priority items that are needed first and foremost. Please can we ask that items are either nearly-new or in good second-hand condition.

<https://www.cfirst.org.uk/donating-to-help-afghan-evacuees/>

4. Possibility of a County Deal

In July, the Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced new ‘County Deals’ as part of his vision for levelling up across the UK with the aim of benefitting local communities. The Government asked for expressions of interest for County Deals by quick return and HCC has registered a formal expression of interest.

Leader of Hampshire County Council, Councillor Keith Mans explained: “In setting out his vision for County Deals in July, the Prime Minister highlighted how these aim to bring decisions and powers closer to people and places. They aim to deliver the best possible deal for local residents at a local level and give places the tools they need to transform and pilot new ideas, create more jobs, drive growth in the economy, improve public services, boost transport, infrastructure and housing, and tackle climate change – the list goes on.

“This is clearly a very exciting, once-in-a-generation opportunity for Hampshire and the wider geographic and economic area, to build on our collective strengths and boost Hampshire as a whole, to help benefit the lives and opportunities of our residents. By expressing our interest now, this commits us to nothing at this stage, but it’s an opportunity we must pursue at pace, for the good of the people of Hampshire. We now wait to hear from Government, their response.”

5. GCSE and A Level results

As I always do in September, I would like to congratulate all students on their results which were obtained in highly challenging circumstances. We have good schools in Hampshire and we can be very proud of the way they have coped with the pandemic. I wish all students success in their future studies and endeavours.

RUSSELL OPPENHEIMER
County Councillor for Petersfield Hangers