



# Smart Places Seminar

Epping Forest College, 15th March 2017

Executive Report







Saboochi Famili welcomes delegates



David Wilde sets out ECC's vision



Alex Perrin outlines Virgin Media's next stage in evolving the business

## Introductions and Welcome

The event began with a welcome from the new Principal of Epping Forest College, Saboochi Famili. Saboochi set out the College's ambitious plan for improvement and highlighted the importance of not only establishing effective digital infrastructure, but also maximising its use. This she felt was critical for all employers in the area and in particular for public service providers looking to increase their efficiency and reach.

## Smart Places Taskforce

Cllr Alan Lion updated delegates on the emerging work programme of the recently established Smart Places Team. Currently, this was a joint initiative by Epping Forest District Council and Essex County Council, but work had attracted significant interest from colleagues in neighbouring councils, local business and infrastructure providers, many of whom were attending the event. It was clear that this work to coordinate, champion, promote and use infrastructure was essential to partners' plans.

We see the Smart Places Taskforce being the engine for expansion of the network with increased competition as well as looking at how all the organisations operating in our area can utilise the opportunities it will bring to serve communities and customers in new, better and more efficient ways. The district will soon reach its initial target of 97% superfast broadband coverage but is already looking at the next investment to reach 99% coverage.

Cllr Lion set out an ambition to establish a **Digital Enterprise Zone** covering west Essex and eastern Hertfordshire to work closely with partners in neighbouring councils, the health and private sectors to ensure that we make the whole greater than the sum of the parts.

## Smart Essex

David Wilde, Chief Information Officer for Essex County Council (ECC) picked out all the key elements of a smarter place where investment was needed and areas where challenges could be met, including smart movement, streamlined public services, smart places and smart lives.

The County Council is already investing significantly and will continue to do so across Essex. But this agenda cannot be delivered by one organisation in isolation. ECC want to work in distinct areas with different opportunities, characteristics and partners. In particular ECC welcomes partnerships with the private sector and joint ventures with public sector colleagues. ECC will be working on a digital strategy for the whole county with a report setting out future ambitions presented to councillors expected in the Summer.

Today was an opportunity to begin to collaborate in a 'distinct place' to test different approaches, see how progress can be unlocked and the network driven 'further and faster.' The county council is committed to taking this project partnership forward and is looking for areas to innovate. Some new programmes around street lamp technology and crowd-funding initiatives are already being planned in Epping Forest.

## Virgin Media New Plans for Expansion

Alex Perrin from Virgin Media focused on the organisation's new approach to investment in developing networks. Virgin had been acquired by Liberty Global and had embarked on a potential £1.7 billion network investment programme that would for the first time see Virgin compete with BT Openreach on 'pipes in the ground.' This was obviously a major opportunity for the company but also local partners who could be a part of this exciting new departure. Virgin had a range of products that can also enable partners to provide services in more joined up and innovative ways, this included some of their social programmes, such as the connected multiple dwelling project, smart street and public Wi-Fi and special joint programmes with GPs around e-health.

Virgin was looking to identify distinct geographies and pilot areas where they could look to deploy the networks responding to current or future need, either from the public, or private sectors. Alex felt that the joint approach, which was reflected in the summit with many commissioning organisations from one place represented, is the way to go. This offered economies of scale, and also the ability for different projects to connect up and 'piggyback' on others. This might enable the new



Joe Foster from Easel TV looks to new ways of meeting customer needs



network to reach out to places that might not otherwise be served.

### Using a TV Platform to meet new needs

Joe Foster from Easel TV addressed delegates on the possibility of using traditional methods to reach, inform and serve communities, but utilising the very latest approaches and technologies. The idea of using TV content while not commonly applied to the direct provision of public services could offer an important added option as part of the digital revolution for service providers.

Joe felt that the full opportunities of local video channels had not been explored effectively and not the blending of this approach with other technologies to give a joined up solution. It was clear that much more work was needed to see how TV based services could be used to deliver a blended approach and a mix of methods of reaching and serving people.

Easel TV were very willing to take part in local exploratory work to see what approaches and technologies might work locally and, of equal importance, find out what applications from major private sector national approaches aren't going to work locally.



## Group Discussion and Next Steps

It was clear that the organisations represented were either already investing significantly or planning significant use of new digital infrastructure as part of their immediate service improvement plans. Speakers emphasised that while it is hard to work across organisational and geographic boundaries, this is where the real opportunity for additional savings and improvements to customer service lay. At the same time it was acknowledged that this is a programme, driven by industry and customer demand, that is testing the market to ensure it is founded upon a clear business case / benefit.

There was a consensus that, wherever possible, significant investment should be communicated widely to enable participation or engagement from a range of partners.

Specifically the following next steps were agreed by partners:

- The Smart Places steering group should be expanded to include representatives from the private sector, health colleagues and neighbouring authorities including west Essex and eastern Herts.
- A clear statement of current capacity and partners planned investment at the moment would be useful across sectors.
- The Taskforce agreed to focus on a number of quick wins with concrete deliverables to demonstrate proof of concept.
- Partners indicated support to joint commission a digital strategy to identify key opportunities for sharing, managing, delivering digital services and infrastructure and establish a digital enterprise zone.
- A bid to West Essex POD Fund would be made immediately on behalf of the steering group with other partners to assess contributions once cost is known.
- The group to reconvene in four months to review progress.
- One Epping Forest to undertake the interim actions outlined above.

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