

Equality Impact Assessment

Reference: EQIA179524632

Submitted: 02 March 2020 10:35 AM

Executive summary

Title of policy or decision: Ultrafast GPs broadband project

Describe the main aims, objectives and purpose of the policy (or decision): ECC is a partner in the Essex and Herts Digital Innovation Zone (DIZ), a collaborative group of five local districts in West Essex and East Hertfordshire working with local businesses, voluntary organisations and other public sector organisations to create an area where digital connectivity and technology are actively driven to improve economic productivity and deliver social benefits.

Working with two NHS IT organisations: EPUT and HBL ICT, the DIZ has secured a grant of £2.1 million from DCMS to upgrade all GP surgeries in the DIZ area to full-fibre internet connectivity under the Ultrafast GPs project. The project will provide full-fibre internet connections for 113 GP practices – covering the catchment area of Princess Alexandra Hospital in Harlow.

The Grant has been awarded in principle by DCMS under their Local Full Fibre Networks Challenge Fund, Wave 3. The fund was open for applications from any public sector organisation. The bidding process on behalf of the DIZ was led by Superfast Essex. The bid team successfully met a full set of requirements for the LFFN Challenge Fund as part of a stringent selection process.

In addition to driving digital innovation within the NHS, the DIZ partnership will drive the delivery of socio-economic benefits under this initiative: A further 565 residential and business premises in the areas around the GPs will also be connected as part of the proposed project.

Furthermore, the project will bring full fibre connectivity within a commercially sustainable distance of up to 8,000 premises in the local area. As part of the project, the DIZ will drive further fibre deployment to these premises via the DCMS Gigabit Voucher Scheme.

What outcome(s) are you hoping to achieve?: Enable inclusive economic growth, Help people get the best start and age well, Help create great places to grow up, live and work

Which strategic priorities does this support? - Enable inclusive economic growth: Target economic development to areas of opportunity

Which strategic priorities does this support? - Help people get the best start and age well: Enable more vulnerable adults to live independent of social care, Improve the health of people in Essex

Which strategic priorities does this support? - Help create great places to grow up, live and work: Help to secure stronger, safer and more neighbourly communities, Help secure sustainable development and protect the environment, Facilitate growing communities and new homes

Is this a new policy (or decision) or a change to an existing policy, practice or project?: a change to an existing policy, practice or project

Assessing the equality impact

Use this section to record how you have assessed any potential impact on the communities likely to be affected by the policy (or decision): The National Perspective

The proposal to upgrade the broadband infrastructure of the 113 GPs across the DIZ geography offers the opportunity to observe the impact of a focused LFFN project that is directly and strategically aligned with the plans and aspirations of the wider health sector, as well as the ambitions of specific local health providers.

The Government Minister for Health, the NHS and the wider GP community have all set out their ambitions for an NHS that is driven by digital technology in order to provide a better, more efficient, and more personalised patient experience. The NHS Long Term Plan establishes the ambitious milestone that by 2024, "...secondary care providers in England...will be fully digitised, including clinical and operational processes across all settings, locations and departments... supported by robust IT infrastructure". Furthermore, the GP Forward View Digital Implementation Strategy states that "A robust and scalable infrastructure is required" to support a programme that includes GP surgery Wi-Fi, virtual desktops and infrastructure for mobile working. "Staff and practitioners would not be bound by building or geography" with the right infrastructure providing resilience and flexibility.

The NHS Long Term Plan is attached as an appendix, however some other key messages to consider include:

- The connecting of home-based and wearable monitoring equipment will increasingly enable the NHS to predict and prevent events that would otherwise have led to a hospital admission.
- To support patients to navigate the optimal service 'channel', they will embed a single multidisciplinary Clinical Assessment Service (CAS) within integrated NHS 111, ambulance dispatch and GP out of hours services from 2019/20.
- Under this Long Term Plan, digital-first primary care will become a new option for every patient, improving fast access to convenient primary care. Over the next five years every patient in England will have a new right to choose this option - usually from their own practice or, if they prefer, from one of the new digital GP providers.

The Local Perspective

Alongside this national perspective, Princess Alexandra Hospital (PAH) NHS Trust in Harlow is setting out its own case for investment by the Department of Health into an alternative form of hospital provision for the region. Increased use of digital technology - such as remote consultations, artificial intelligence and wearable monitors - supported by appropriate infrastructure, is central to their business case. The current capacity of the Trust is already vastly over-stretched, with demand for services expected to grow further in the next few years. The Trust is developing a digital strategy to meet these challenges and deliver against the NHS Long Term Plan.

The new technologies the Trust is considering for implementation will require stable, high-speed communications between the hospital and the primary care sites, as described below:

- The introduction of wearable technology to allow real-time monitoring of patients in their homes or communities. This is a tested model which can reduce lengths of stay and/or avoid admissions. Treatment in the community reduces impact on inpatient services and there is evidence of better patient experience. Faster and more stable internet connectivity will help build confidence in the technology and speed up its adoption. Banner Healthcare in the US has introduced this technology across 28 hospitals and has reduced admissions by close to 50%.
- Video links that enable face-to-face communication between patients, Primary Care, Community Trusts and Acute Trusts. This can be on smart phones, tablets or PCs and may need to be a multiway conversation, which requires a good communications infrastructure.
- Video conferencing to hold outpatient appointments in GP surgeries where a review of diagnostics information would be required. Diagnostic images and complex patient records require fast communications to make this practical.
- Video conferencing case reviews will require similar high-speed communications.

In the future, the devices deployed to monitor patients, prescribing, diagnostics, diagnosis and a variety of other information sources will be incorporated into "Big-Data" analysis and with the use of Artificial Intelligence to assist with clinical decision making and early detection of health issues. These systems will require a fast, reliable communications infrastructure to enable their use, including high speed communication to and between healthcare providers. High speed fibre into GP practices will therefore become increasingly essential to enable the efficient use of these systems.

The key message from PAH NHS Trust in Harlow is that new infrastructure is needed to support the NHS 10 Year Plan and the treatment of patients with greater focus on services available within the community. The Ultrafast GPs project seeks to put in place one of the foundations for this future

work.

Does or will the policy or decision affect:

Service users: Yes

Employees: Yes

The wider community or groups of people, particularly where there are areas of known inequalities: Yes

Which geographical areas of Essex does or will the policy or decision affect?: Epping Forest, Harlow, Uttlesford

Will the policy or decision influence how organisations operate?: Yes

Will the policy or decision involve substantial changes in resources?: No

Is this policy or decision associated with any of the Council's other policies?: No

Description of impact

Description of Impact. If there is an impact on a specific protected group tick box, otherwise leave blank. You will be given the opportunity to rate identified impacts as positive, negative or neutral on the next page: Age, Disability - physical impairment

I confirm that I have considered the potential impact on all of the protected characteristics: I confirm that I have considered the potential impact on all of the protected characteristics

Describe any actions that have already been taken to mitigate negative impacts on any of the protected characteristics: n/a - impacts will be positive

Age

Nature of impact: Positive

Please provide more details about the nature of impact: elderly patients will be able to access GP services more easily by using online options

Extent of impact: Medium

Please provide more details about the extent of impact: introduction of digital services is to be led by the NHS and will take place gradually over time

Disability - physical impairment

Nature of impact: Positive

Please provide more details about the nature of impact: Physically impaired patients will have easier access to GPs services due to the ability to access more of these online

Extent of impact: Medium

Please provide more details about the extent of impact: introduction of the new digital services will be led by the NHS, so will happen gradually over time

Action plan to address and monitor adverse impacts

Does your EqlA indicate that the policy or decision would have a medium or high adverse impact on one or more equality groups?: No

Details of person completing the form

I confirm that this has been completed based on the best information available and in following ECC guidance: I confirm that this has been completed based on the best information available and in following ECC guidance

Date EqIA completed: 02/03/2020

Name of person completing the EqIA: Connie Kerbst

Email address of person completing the EqIA: Connie.Kerbst@essex.gov.uk

Your function: Economy, Localities & Public Health

Your service area: Economic Growth

Your team: Superfast Essex broadband programme

Are you submitting this EqIA on behalf of another function, service area or team?: No

Email address of Head of Service: Dawn.Redpath@essex.gov.uk