

Islington Broadband

Introduction

To deliver Islington Labour's manifesto commitment to ensuring all estates in the borough have access to high speed, cheap broadband, Islington Broadband is a partnership between Homes and Neighbourhoods and full-fibre broadband providers to offer faster, more reliable internet services to our 36,000 council homes as well as non-residential housing assets such as community centres and concierge offices.

Background

Islington's approach

Understanding the priority for council residents to access faster, more reliable, and affordable internet connectivity in their homes, in July 2021 CMB agreed that Homes and Neighbourhoods should enable delivery of these services through a borough-wide master wayleave agreement with telecommunication providers. The agreement to be developed in a way that maximises the number of properties able to access high speed connections, not just those deemed most profitable by providers, protects council buildings and estates more widely from damage or disruption and realises the maximum social benefit and provides as much choice to our residents as possible.

Since CMB, the Islington Broadband project team has been working to mobilise the programme with oversight from a Steering Group chaired by Ian Swift, Director of Housing Needs and Strategy and comprising colleagues from across Homes and Neighbourhoods, Digital Services, Legal Services and Community Wealth Building.

Our approach is informed by building relationships with other London Boroughs who are at different stages in their rollout programmes as well as through the Central London Forward Digital Connectivity Group which shares intelligence with those teams tasked with improving digital connectivity in their boroughs as well as working with the market to address the shared challenges.

Current status

Market engagement with the telecommunication providers was carried out in early 2022 by way of an Expression of Interest exercise. We set out the requirements for the council as a condition of working on our estates and installing equipment in our buildings:

- Robust technical, health and safety and design requirements
- connecting 90% of estate properties across the Borough
- delivery of community benefits.

Three companies came forward as a result of the EOI and, following negotiations, as of 1st October 2022, our master wayleave has been signed with two well-known and experienced companies – Community Fibre and Hyperoptic. Negotiations continue with G-Network whilst starting mobilisation plans and engagement with BT Openreach commenced in September. We also anticipate that further providers may come forward in the future.

Mobilisation meetings with three providers have been continuing throughout the summer months to gear up for works starting as soon as possible. Jointly led by the Broadband Delivery Manager from Property Services and the HRA Business Plan Manager, the meetings have included colleagues from Corporate Communications to align the resident communication processes and materials and from New Build for information and inclusion in the programme. As of October 2022, survey pilots have been completed and the first installations will be shortly commencing with live services available to residents by the end of the year on the pilot sites. The first phase of the main programme for two ISPs are due to commence surveying estates in Bunhill and Clerkenwell Wards in October for installation by February 2023 and second phase surveys commencing February 2023 onwards - see Appendix 1. This programme will be kept up to date as the programme progresses and published on the Islington Broadband webpage. The whole programme is likely to take 3 years to complete.

Programme delivery

Although the council is not able to influence the rollout programme due to the constraints of the Electronic Communications Code, we have negotiated the terms of the agreement with the telecommunication providers to ensure that we got the best possible deal for our residents and that the rollout was carried out in a way that ensures the safety of our council homes and allows us to carry out repairs and maintenance to our stock in the future. This is the reason why we are not able to sign wayleaves for individual properties. Importantly, the programme is co-ordinated with technical teams in Property Services to ensure that our health and safety, including fire safety and asbestos management requirements are met.

It is clear how important the council's role to tightly project manage this programme to make sure that the installations meet our requirements in our wayleave agreement and technical schedules.

In addition to the residential portfolio, we have identified HRA commercial assets to be included in the programme. The wayleave agreement also covers all street properties. We will be providing details of the rollout programmes and publishing them on our webpage www.islington.gov.uk/broadband once they have been received from the providers.

Community benefits

Now that the mobilisation programmes are underway, working with housing, VCS and iWork colleagues, we are starting to develop and take forward the community value offers which include:

- Apprenticeships
- Supporting council's 100 Hours World of Work
- Work with Employment and Skills team to identify residents suitable for employment

- Free gigabit connections, some in perpetuity, for community centres and other housing assets such as temporary accommodation or as identified by the Steering Group
- £20K contribution to digital inclusion /skills training
- Discounted services for digitally excluded residents.

The Steering Group will monitor how these benefits are realised over the course of the programme with the expectation that the providers will report progress.

Glossary

Electronic Communications Code - the framework that governs the nationwide rollout of broadband provision. The Code limits the influence that the council can exert over telecommunications providers as it specifically prevents any landowner from restricting access to land or property to install electronic communications equipment, where a Code registered provider can demonstrate that it is expanding choice or improving connectivity for residents or businesses.

Full-fibre broadband: the fastest and most reliable type of broadband. It uses fibre optic cables that run directly into homes or buildings, rather than the old-style copper wiring used in standard internet services. It allows households to use multiple internet services and different devices at the same time.

Wayleave: a contractual agreement between a landowner or landlord and a telecoms provider. In this instance, our wayleave agreement enables the provider to have access rights to land/and or property to install, maintain or repair telecoms apparatus.