

Essex + Herts Digital Innovation Zone

Press Release – 01 September 2020



www.diz.org.uk

Digital project for GP surgeries to benefit thousands

Patients using GP surgeries in East Hertfordshire and West Essex are set to benefit from better quality online care thanks to nearly £2m investment in a digital project.

A 'full fibre' broadband network will be created to provide ultrafast digital connectivity, capable of speeds up to 1Gbps – up to 30 times faster than superfast broadband - to all 83 GP surgery sites in Broxbourne, East Herts, Epping Forest, Harlow and Uttlesford districts, helping to put them at the forefront of digital health care.

The £1.7m investment from the Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport's Local Full Fibre Networks (LFFN) programme will enable GP services to potentially deliver more care health care remotely, online and through digital applications.

These are all tasks which have become vitally important during the COVID-19 pandemic that has made online, remote and digital access a necessity. The project will help to make the local health providers more resilient in the future with increased capacity for online activity.

The project, which is led by Essex + Herts Digital Innovation Zone (DIZ) and has already commenced its detailed planning and delivery stage, was developed by Epping Forest District Council and Essex County Council with support from Hertfordshire County Council and Broxbourne, East Herts, Harlow and Uttlesford district councils. It will be delivered on behalf of local health partners by Openreach in partnership with Capita Updata and Redcentric and is due to complete by March 2021.

In addition, the new broadband network built to the surgeries will also support future demand for fibre broadband from the thousands of residential and business properties located in the local areas around the surgeries. This will support local people to make greater use of digital technology to access the health and care services they need as well as the wider benefits of enhanced high-speed connectivity.

This is one of a number of projects to be awarded funding under the LFFN programme and the first project of its kind to focus the network build specifically around local GP surgeries. The project has been developed in conjunction with Essex County Council's Superfast Essex programme, Essex Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust (EPUT), West Essex Clinical Commissioning Group (WECCG) and Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire and Luton ICT Shared Services (HBLICT).

Digital Infrastructure Minister Matt Warman said:

"The best possible connectivity means our healthcare providers can give people the best possible service. I'm pleased that we're investing £1.7m in broadband for West Essex and East Hertfordshire and that so many local GP practices will have even greater capacity.

"This government has committed £5 billion to help roll out gigabit broadband across the UK and this step in future-proofing the network will ensure long-term benefits for the wider community."

Cllr Alan Lion, Chair of the Essex + Herts Digital Innovation Zone said:

"Our aim is to make our area the best-connected place of its type in the UK, bringing the benefits of digital services to all. This project and the infrastructure it will provide will give our GPs the capacity to provide the latest and best digital health and care services to our residents. The funding award by DCMS is a recognition of the innovative work that is going on in our place and I'd like to thank Essex County Council and our health partners from across Hertfordshire and Essex that have supported this successful bid."

Cllr Lesley Wagland, Deputy to the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Infrastructure at Essex County Council, which helped lead the DIZ bid, said:

“I am so pleased by this success story! This project is a great step in improving the digital experience and opportunities for those that use and deliver our health services and to realising the significant benefits from full fibre broadband connectivity for our residents. Health and care services with digital services based around the patient and our local communities will be a key component of this. Full fibre broadband will help those providing the services to do so closer to where people want them but also to work better, more efficiently and in a joined-up way.”

Dr Rachel Joyce, Medical Director of the East and North Hertfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group (ENHCCG), said:

“Our patients have had to access health care in different ways due to the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, and we need to ensure this access can improve in order to help future-proof the quality of services in the future.

“People connect with the NHS when they’re worried and anxious, so it is really important that their experience is enhanced as much as possible for the best outcome. I’m thrilled that surgeries in our area will be at the forefront of this development, and I want to thank everyone involved in securing this investment!”

Janette Leonard, Director of ITT Business Analysis and Reporting at EPUT, said:

“To transform how people access healthcare it is vital that we have the right digital infrastructure in place. Building this full fibre broadband network is a significant step forward for people in West Essex and East Hertfordshire. We are very excited to play a key role in implementing this project.”

Cllr David Williams, Leader of Hertfordshire County Council said:

“The Essex & Herts Digital Innovation Zone is an outstanding example of local public sector collaboration and, in particular, between local government and health partners. Looking forward, we can expect fibre connectivity to underpin the NHS’s vision for the future of general practice and primary care and so it’s important to see this investment being made locally.”

Cllr Linda Haysey, Vice-Chair of the DIZ, Leader of East Herts District Council and a member of the Hertfordshire Health and Wellbeing Board said:

“This is great news for patients and residents in both eastern Hertfordshire and west Essex. It also highlights the importance of all the organisations who provide public services working ever more closely together, coordinating their work to secure investment that can pave the way for 21st Century health care approaches.”

Peter Wightman, Managing Director at West Essex CCG, said:

“This new broadband network will futureproof the way residents across west Essex access GP services. They deserve a reliable and quick way to get in touch with their healthcare services and this will also make our GPs’ work more effective. We are really excited about the programme and would like to say thanks to everyone for making it happen.”

Michael Meredith, Director of Strategy and Estates at Princess Alexandra Hospital said:

“This is really great news. The additional investment in the health and care digital infrastructure is a major step forward, helping us to continually develop our services and care in ways that meet our patients needs best. The hospital and our health partners are working to ensure that we use digital where we can to improve services and outcomes, but we will not lose sight of the human element in the work that we do.”

NOTE TO EDITORS

Essex + Herts Digital Innovation Zone (DIZ) is an innovative cross-sector partnership made up of service providers and groups across west Essex and eastern Hertfordshire with the aim of making the area the best-connected place of its type in the UK. Developing digital infrastructure and greater investment to

future proof local economic success and enable service providers to deliver better, more cost effective and joined up services to local people.

Further information is available at www.diz.org.uk

Contact Mike Warr, DIZ Programme Manager for more information at mwarr@eppingforestdc.gov.uk

Superfast Essex is a broadband improvement programme run by Essex County Council. It is part of the Government's national Superfast Broadband programme and is funded by Essex County Council, the Government and the network operators working on each contract.

For further information go to www.superfastessex.org/

Essex Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust (EPUT) was formed on 1 April 2017 following the merger of North Essex Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust (NEP) and South Essex Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust (SEPT). EPUT provide community health, mental health and learning disability services for a population of approximately 1.3 million people throughout Bedfordshire, Essex, Suffolk and Luton. They employ 5,000 members of staff across 200 sites.

For further information go to www.eput.nhs.uk

Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire & Luton ICT Shared Services (HBLICT) support the delivery of ICT services to GP Practices. The Primary Care Information Communication and Technology (ICT) Team manages ICT services in GP Practices, including service support, infrastructure and desktop support, on behalf of the two Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire and Luton CCGs. Furthermore, Primary Care ICT provides advice and support on investment in discretionary IT systems and services to CCGs.

For further information go to <https://www.hblict.nhs.uk/>