


REPORT TO HEALTH AND ADULT SOCIAL CARE SCRUTINY BOARD

06 July 2020

Subject:	5G Mobile Communication Technologies
Contribution towards Vision 2030:	
Report:	Lisa McNally, Director of Public Health
<u>DECISION RECOMMENDATIONS</u>	
<p>That Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Board:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Monitor evidence of misinformation locally. 2. Recommend increasing the availability of factual information presented in ways credible to our local population. 	

1 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 This report provides context and background to concerns that 5G technologies may be related to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 1.2 It places these concerns in the context of ongoing health-based conspiracy theories and characterises the potential risks from such theories.

2 IMPLICATIONS FOR VISION 2030

- 2.1 Ambition 2: beliefs around 5G communication technologies and their impacts may affect health behaviours related to the COVID-19 epidemic. Incorrect beliefs that 5G is responsible for the pandemic may inhibit collective and public health action such as social distancing, contact tracing and other infection prevention measures.
- 2.2 Ambition 5: 5G masts have been deliberately damaged in neighbouring local authorities. Loss of trust and a sense of not being listened to may result in people feeling forced to take more radical action.

3 BACKGROUND AND MAIN CONSIDERATIONS

- 3.1 The COVID-19 has been declared a Public Health Emergency of International Concern. Since then over 2 million people worldwide have been infected, and over 40,000 people have died in the UK accompanied by significant social and economic disruption.
- 3.2 COVID-19 is a disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2a virus, a member of the family of coronaviruses. There is no question within the expert scientific consensus that the SARS-CoV-2a virus is responsible for the pandemic.
- 3.3 This virus is likely a cross-species infection originating in bats, in whom many species of coronaviruses are present.
- 3.4 A number of conspiracy theories have arisen around the causes of the pandemic. Many of these conspiracy theories are related to previously existing theories common to anti-vaccination campaigners and other movements, and those movements are merging into a community calling themselves “truth seekers”.
- 3.5 The World Health Organisation describes the false claims surrounding the outbreak as an ‘infodemic’ and warns it could have significant impacts on worldwide management of the pandemic.
- 3.6 5G communication technologies represent the next iteration of wireless large area communications by increasing the range of frequencies at which these communications can be broadcast. Anti-5G conspiracy theories have existed for some time; in 2018, a man scaled a lamppost to remove what he thought was a 5G antenna as he believed it was causing cancer.
- 3.7 Introducing a 5G mast may increase exposure to radio waves within a local area. However, the maximum exposure is expected to remain below 1.5% of recommended maximum levels and there should be no consequences for public health. The mobile data is transmitted over non-ionising radio waves, meaning they do not carry enough energy to directly damage a person’s DNA inside cells. Frequent measurements throughout the UK show that exposures of the general public to radio waves are well within the international health-related guideline levels that are used in the UK.

4 THE CURRENT POSITION

- 4.1 There is no evidence of a link between 5G and COVID-19 and no reason for this claim to be broadcast. COVID-19 is also spreading in many countries that do not have 5G mobile networks.
- 4.2 Disinformation, half-truths and conspiracy theories around COVID-19 do have a potential health impact on our residents. These can negatively impact on an individual's behaviour, reduce their adherence to government guidance, cause people to damage infrastructure and have a negative impact on mental health and wellbeing.
- 4.3 Effectively combating these risks is difficult. Public debates on conspiracy theory tend only to enhance their reach; the root causes of low trust in government and scientific authorities, and unopposed spread via social media, need to be targeted to reduce misinformation spread.
- 4.4 Accurate factual information from neutral organisations (e.g. FullFact.org) may be more effective than Local Authorities to correct misinformation; endorsing and encouraging their use can oppose misinformation, while SMBC can provide local information and guidance about COVID-19.
- 4.5 Anti-5G movements may grow alongside vaccine hesitancy in the "truth seeker" communities; this may pose future risks regarding roll out and uptake of potential vaccines for COVID-19, as well as affecting other vaccination programmes.

5 HEALTH AND WELLBEING IMPLICATIONS (INCLUDING SOCIAL VALUE)

- 5.1 Many of the health and wellbeing implications are documented above, and concern progress towards managing the pandemic and social cohesion.
- 5.2 Conspiracy theories raise wider questions about trust in credible authorities, often affecting particular communities. Correctly engaging with these issues can help prevent communities from feeling isolated and left behind by authorities.

6 IMPACT ON ANY COUNCIL MANAGED PROPERTY OR LAND

- 6.1 5G masts may become targets for vandalism. If any are placed on council estates, this may pose a risk to council property.

7 CONCLUSIONS AND SUMMARY OF REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

- 7.1 Monitoring the evidence of misinformation locally will give us a better understanding of the situation.
- 7.2 Recommending increasing the availability of factual information, presented in ways credible to our local population will reduce the chance of people believing misinformation they come across.

8 BACKGROUND PAPERS AND LINKS

- 8.1 Public Health England Guidance on 5G Technologies: radio waves and health, October 2019. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/5g-technologies-radio-waves-and-health/5g-technologies-radio-waves-and-health>
- 8.2 Health-protective behaviour, social media usage and conspiracy belief during the COVID-19 public health emergency, Cambridge University Press, June 2020 <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/psychological-medicine/article/healthprotective-behaviour-social-media-usage-and-conspiracy-belief-during-the-covid19-public-health-emergency/A0DC2C5E27936FF4D5246BD3AE8C9163>
- 8.3 'Why 5G conspiracy theories prosper during the coronavirus pandemic', The Conversation, April 2020 <https://theconversation.com/why-5g-conspiracy-theories-prosper-during-the-coronavirus-pandemic-136019>
- 8.4 'Man scaled lamppost to remove '5G antenna' after viral post claimed it was harmful', The Evening Chronicle, May 2018 <https://www.chroniclelive.co.uk/news/north-east-news/man-scaled-lamppost-remove-5g-14672752>
- 8.5 Infodemic management – Infodemiology, World Health Organisation (WHO), June 2020 <https://www.who.int/teams/risk-communication/infodemic-management>

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