

CONNECTING COMMUNITIES FORUM – 20th NOVEMBER 2014

Agenda item 7 – RURAL BROADBAND UPDATE

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The Council is part of the Connecting Devon & Somerset (CDS) Partnership which is working to improve rural broadband services. The £94m CDS project aims to provide superfast broadband to 90% of properties across Devon, Somerset, North Somerset & B&NES by 2016.
- 1.2 The programme is restricted by State Aid rules to areas which are served by non-commercial single provider telephone exchanges.
- 1.3 This paper provides an update on the current position regarding the work of the CDS Partnership and the roll-out of superfast broadband to the rural areas of B&NES. It also covers the support which is now available specifically to businesses and organisations within B&NES.

2. CDS - CURRENT POSITION

Current Programme

- 2.1 Survey work on existing rural service networks is now underway in B&NES and the roll-out of superfast broadband is expected to start in 2015. The survey work will determine the future programme for service provision and this is therefore subject to change on an ongoing basis.
- 2.2 This makes it difficult to be precise on the timetable for the provision of superfast broadband to specific communities / locations within the area. However to assist with information provision the CDS website <http://www.connectingdevonandsomerset.co.uk/> now provides a postcode search facility. By using this facility specific properties can determine whether they are included in the rural broadband roll-out programme and the current schedule for survey work in the area.
- 2.3 The website also includes a map covering the whole of the CDS area showing locations that are live, soon to be covered and under evaluation. The map also shows the areas which are covered “commercially” and therefore not included and the “grey” areas which are currently outside the programme.

Additional Funding

- 2.4 CDS has also been successful in securing additional government funding for a further investment of £38.3m in extending the coverage of rural broadband to 95% of properties. Building on commercial provision from the private sector, this new investment will enable CDS to increase coverage to 95% of homes and businesses by 2017 and and it puts the programme well on the way to achieving its target of 100% coverage by 2020. This CDS BDUK programme delivers fibre to the cabinet, providing

broadband speeds of up to 24mbps, but the actual speed will depend on distance of the premise from the cabinet.

- 2.5 It is proposed to run an open procurement exercise to find the best partners to deliver broadband solutions funded by this additional investment. CDS aim to select one or more partners by next February. By that time, CDS will also be able to identify the communities that will benefit from the additional funding.

3. BUSINESS BROADBAND

- 3.1 Bath and North East Somerset companies and organisations within 5 miles of the Bristol boundary are now able to benefit from the national Super-Connected Cities Programme by getting a connection voucher of up to £3,000 for faster, better broadband. The attached plan shows the area and main communities covered by the five mile extension.
- 3.2 You can input the postcode for a specific property into the online checker at <https://www.connectionvouchers.co.uk/city/bristol/> to confirm that the premises are eligible.
- 3.3 Companies and organisations within the 5 miles radius should have received a letter encouraging them to take up the opportunity. To receive a voucher, eligible businesses will need a connection quote from a broadband supplier. Wireless solutions are also valid and groups of businesses or organisations, in a location such as a business park, can combine their vouchers to achieve a solution. Funds need to be allocated by March 2015.
- 3.4 Questions about the Connection Vouchers Scheme should be addressed to Bristol City Council who are administering the scheme. The Council can be contacted by email at <mailto:connection.vouchers@bristol.gov.uk> or by phoning 0117 357 4445.
- 3.5 Partners in the West of England are continuing to lobby Government to have the scheme extended across the whole of the sub-region.

4. BROADBAND POSITION

- 4.1 The Council's Community Regeneration have appointed Matthys van Tonder to the Broadband post. This is a two year fixed term post with the remit to drive forward the delivery of Broad band and WiFi across B&NES. This will include exploring options for sharing access to the School Fibre Network across B&NES.
- 4.2 Matthys is a highly knowledgeable IT expert who led the roll-out of high speed broadband across urban and rural South Africa using combinations of fibre and wifi/microwave technologies. He commences work for B&NES on Monday 24th November.
- 4.3 The intention is that Matthys will be available to meet with communities across B&NES to identify the most appropriate solution to rolling out broadband to those areas.