

PARISHES LIAISON MEETING – 20TH JUNE 2012

Briefing for newly-elected councillors: Connecting Devon and Somerset May 2012

Programme background

The Connecting Devon and Somerset Programme, led by Devon County Council and Somerset County Council aims to provide 100% broadband coverage of 2Mbps with a minimum of 85% superfast broadband at 24Mbps by 2015 and superfast broadband for all by 2020. The original bid was submitted in partnership with Plymouth, Torbay, and North Somerset Councils and secured £31m Government funding from BDUK. When Bath and North East Somerset Council (B&NES) joined the Programme, a further £700,000 was awarded. Somerset and Devon County Councils have committed further funding of up to £10 million each, bringing the public sector investment to a total of £53 million. The Programme aims to secure further funding from the private sector. For more information, please visit our website at www.connectingdevonandsomerset.co.uk.

Other Broadband Projects in Devon and Somerset

There are a number of different broadband projects operating in the Devon and Somerset area, but only two are currently funded with public money: **Connecting Devon and Somerset** and **The Rural Connection**.

The Rural Connection is a project operating on the Devon/Somerset borders, funded through the European Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE). It aims to connect over 1,000 digitally excluded rural homes and businesses in selected areas of North, Mid and East Devon, and Wheddon Cross in Somerset through satellite broadband. The project offers a grant to enable residents and businesses in these areas to install satellite broadband, offering 6-10 Mbps on a first come-first served basis. This comes with free technical and user support to all households and businesses in the eligible areas.

The private sector is also extending its broadband provision. This has the potential to complement the Connecting Devon and Somerset Programme by reducing the overall number of slow or no broadband areas across the two counties. **BT**, for example, is rolling out its own superfast broadband product, BT Infinity, through its Openreach local network business. Openreach is making super-fast broadband available to around two-thirds of UK homes and businesses by the end of 2014. Recently, it announced it would be rolling out superfast broadband to parts of **Torbay, Plymouth, Sidmouth, Cullompton and Glastonbury**.

It is important to understand, that communities with slow or no broadband provision NOT covered by these private sector roll-outs, are precisely the ones that Connecting Devon and Somerset has been set up to help. For Plymouth this includes parts of Roborough and Plymstock, and the wider travel-to-work area of the South Hams.

CDS Programme Aim

CDS aims to provide 100% broadband coverage of 2Mbps with a minimum of 85% superfast broadband at 24Mbps by 2015 and superfast broadband for all by 2020.

Timescale

Press and PR campaign; stakeholder briefings

From January 2012

Survey of demand for faster broadband
Procurement process for supplier begins
Supplier appointed
Rollout of faster broadband begins

February 2012 (until late summer)
May 2012
October 2013
Early 2013

Registering for faster broadband

Since January there has been a two-fold focus to activity: raising political and public awareness of the programme (through MP, councillor and editor briefings along with media coverage); and encouraging businesses and individuals to complete a survey, registering their need for broadband along with their current experiences and speed. The survey will provide evidence of demand which will be vital in upcoming negotiations with suppliers in terms of roll out and funding.

Registering for the survey is easy and can be done by:

- calling 0844 4636887
- visiting the the website www.connectingdevonandsomerset.co.uk
- completing a paper questionnaire. (Leaflets posters and paper questionnaires can be ordered from Chibugo Okorie on 01392 382094 chibugo.okorie@devon.gov.uk.)

A dedicated team has also been phoning people to complete the survey to ensure a statistically representative response. So far over 22,000 response have been received.

Demand Stimulation

The programme team is now beginning a programme of work to stimulate interest and increase likely future uptake of faster broadband. A company is being appointed to deliver events and workshops in communities across Devon & Somerset to help businesses and residents get more confident in their Internet usage. We will also be continuing with media articles, issuing a newsletter and increasing our social media activity. The demand stimulation work – similar to that being undertaken by BT Openreach and Plymouth Chamber of Commerce – is vital. We need businesses to understand what they can achieve interms of productivity and growth simply by utilising the Internet more effectively.

Procurement Process and State Aid

The public sector procurement process to appoint a supplier will begin as soon as BDUK finish their discussions with the European Commission over the granting of State Aid. State Aid regulation is a mechanism to ensure that market competition is not distorted through the use of public money. In terms of CDS this means that programme team must show that there is no planned deployment of basic or superfast broadband by the private sector within 3 years of the state aid application for those areas it plans to cover. As this will apply to all BDUK programmes nationwide, the negotiations are taking place at national level. The procurement process follows a lengthy and rigorous timetable, as required by law, to ensure best value.

How you can help

If you know of any businesses, communities or individuals in your ward who need improved broadband, please encourage them to take part in the survey. We also have posters, questionnaires and leaflets available.

If you are aware of any businesses, communities or individuals who have an interesting broadband story to tell, we'd love to talk to them. It may be that superfast broadband has made a real difference to their business; or perhaps they're a homemaker crying out for a better service – either way, their story can help promote the programme. You may know of individuals who could take on a role as 'community champion'. Or perhaps there's a local event where the programme team should have a

presence. We'll keep you up to date with progress via briefings for councillors and the programme newsletter. But please do get in touch if you'd like more information or are keen to get involved.