Wiltshire Online Summary

February 2012

Wiltshire Online Background

Use of the internet has become an important part of daily life for many people over the last few years and is absolutely essential for most businesses – but availability, speed and reliability of coverage can be an issue. Wiltshire Council is committed to ensuring that all residents and businesses have access to fast, reliable and affordable broadband. Helping to make people more confident users of online technology and providing easier access are important and integral to our work.

The programme's overall themes are:

- Connectivity and provision: the targets for coverage are for all premises to be able to access a standard (minimum 2Mbps) broadband service and for at least 85%, possibly up to 95% of all premises being able to access superfast broadband (minimum 24 Mbps) by 2015.

- Public access to Wi-Fi from libraries: work is in progress to implement free public Wi-Fi from libraries during 2012.

- Developing a low-cost, recycled computer scheme for vulnerable groups

- Digital Literacy: helping people to become confident to use technology and get online. The programme is currently running a pilot in the Melksham area and will be working across the county during 2012.

- Access to online services: using the Digitial Literacy theme, to promote the use of the council's online services.

Superfast Broadband Consultation

In 2011, the government launched the national Broadband Delivery UK (BDUK) initiative to drive broadband improvement right across the country. BDUK has confirmed that Wiltshire Council is entitled to receive £4.7m along with its own investment of £16m. In January South Gloucestershire and Swindon joined the Wiltshire process to select a commercial broadband infrastructure provider under the government's Broadband Delivery UK project. The subsequent procurement will bring about significant savings in project costs. It is also hoped that the larger scale of the project will result in a more commercially attractive area for potential bidders, encouraging greater competition and enhancing the scheme's value for money.

The contract will secure a single private sector delivery partner to co-fund the installation of broadband infrastructure across the area. This will provide a wholesale access broadband network allowing new retail broadband services to be available to businesses and residents to purchase.

State aid rules

The European Commission (EC) requires that local authorities only invest in areas where they can demonstrate there is no current, or planned (i.e. within the next three years) deployment of either standard or superfast broadband by the private sector. These are termed "white areas", i.e. those where it is possible to invest with public subsidy. As part of the procurement process an application to invest in these areas, following public consultation, must be submitted to the Department for Media Culture and Sport (DCMS).

The consultation

Broadband providers are being consulted on their existing superfast broadband networks in Wiltshire, Swindon and South Gloucestershire and whether they have any plans to deploy superfast broadband in the area over the next three years. This is to check that the information the councils are using as a basis for the procurement is correct and that any investment is correctly targetted.

Comments from businesses and residents are also welcome. The Wiltshire Online web site www.wiltshireonline.org has a link to the broadband consultation on the front page that will take the visitor to more detailed information. This includes two maps that show where there is basic broadband across the county and where there is (or will be by end of 2012) superfast broadband. Comments about the accuracy of the coverage are particulalry welcome.

Responses to this consultation document and requests for further information should be directed to Ian Baker: digitalinclusion@wiltshire.gov.uk by 17:00 on 16 March 2012. After the consultation has closed, the two intervention area maps will be updated prior to going to start the tender for contract.

The council's Strategic Economy Partnership is running a Business Perception survey which has a section targetted towards broadand requirement. Local businesses may wish to use this opportunity to provide additional feedback. The survey is available from www.wsep.org/news/wiltshire-business-perception-survey.

Next steps
The indicative project timescales at present are::

1s February 2012 – 16 March 2012	Consultation on the proposed 'White Intervention areas'
Summer 2012	Award contract to successful supplier
Winter 2012	Infrastructure and civil work begins
April 2015	Infrastructure roll out complete

It is hoped the infrastructure work will begin during winter 2012, with the first residents and businesses able to sign up for superfast broadband by the end of 2012. However, the scale of the engineering works means that they are expected to take until April 2015 to be completed. More detailed timescales on the infrastructure roll out will be provided once the supplier is awarded the contract and has completed detailed survey work.