

## Councillors' Briefing Note No. 125

**Department:**

**Further Enquiries to:**

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### Wiltshire Online Programme

#### Background

The Wiltshire Online Programme aims to bring superfast broadband to homes and businesses across the county. At present, not all parts of Wiltshire have access to broadband and those that do may experience slow speeds and poor service. This means that residents and businesses in the county struggle to make full use of the internet and online services. Poor broadband services are seen as a major obstacle to sustained economic growth and investment in the county.

The main aims of the programme are:

- To improve access to broadband for citizens and businesses in Wiltshire. A minimum of 85%, hopefully up to 95% of premises being able to access superfast broadband, over 24Mbps, by 2015 and all other premises to have access to a minimum broadband service of 2Mbps.
- To ensure that every adult has the opportunity to be a confident user of technology.
- To increase the uptake and usage of council online services.

#### Summary of the procurement progress:

The Wiltshire Online procurement team completed the evaluation process for superfast broadband on 17 October.

The Contract Awarding Group met on 22 October to review the evaluation by the procurement team and to approve British Telecom (BT) as the preferred bidder. This was formally announced on 12 November.

Swindon Borough Council chose not to proceed to contract with BT and are in discussions with Broadband Delivery UK (BDUK) about other options that are available to them.

Wiltshire and South Gloucestershire Councils (under the name Great Western Broadband, GWB) will be completing contract finalisation and review of their respective project models with BT over the coming weeks.

GWB is looking to sign the contract with BT at the end of January. This represents a 6 week delay which is due to two main reasons:

- Final amendments being made to the template contract by BDUK and BT
- The need to re-check the project model for Wiltshire and South Gloucestershire.

I am pleased to say that the EU Commission has issued confirmation of its agreement with the UK Government's application asserting that the BDUK broadband scheme is compatible with State Aid law. This State Aid approval will in turn be granted to local projects and BDUK will begin to clear the backlog of approvals for projects needing to sign contracts.

In February, the Wiltshire Online Programme should then be able to provide details about the overall percentage coverage of superfast broadband, the technologies to be used and high level information about the rollout plans. An update will be given to Area Boards either by providing a chairman's announcement and links to the Wiltshire Online website, or by a presentation.

Once the contract has been awarded, BT will build their delivery team and start upon their detailed surveying of the infrastructure across Wiltshire. Surveying will occur in phases across Wiltshire with the network rollout following shortly afterwards in that area. The timescales for this and the number of surveys to be completed will be shared after the award of the contract.

Though specific information about each community area will not be available from February, the Wiltshire Online Programme will be able to provide more specific information as the project progresses through the phases of implementation. Ahead of each phase each Community Area affected will be provided with detailed information about the forthcoming rollout particulars including practical advice and also guidance on how to respond to any questions.

At any time the website [www.wiltshireonline.org](http://www.wiltshireonline.org) will have the most up to date information and the Wiltshire Online Team is available to speak to.

## **Public Wi-Fi in Wiltshire Libraries**

Progress with the rollout of Public Wi-Fi continues to go well. It is now available in over half of our libraries. A full list of libraries with this service can be accessed from the council web site:

<http://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/council/councilownedpremises/wopublicwifi.htm>

The service has also been installed into 4 of the council run leisure centres, the three main hub sites as well as a number of other council buildings that have public access.

We are also providing businesses and community groups with the opportunity to advertise any free Wi-Fi services they provide. Details and locations such as cafes, pubs and village halls are listed on the Wiltshire Online web pages. Details can be registered at:

<http://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/wiltshireonline/request-a-wi-fi-window-sticker/>

Wiltshire Online will then list their details and send a window sticker in return to help promote their Wi-Fi availability.

## **Digital Literacy:**

Volunteer coordinators are now active in a total of nine community areas across the county. Since the last briefing, Coordinators have been found for the Westbury, Warminster, Devizes and Royal Wootton Bassett and Cricklade community areas.

The recruitment of Digital Champions is now well underway in seven of these areas, with the remaining two due to come online in the coming weeks. It is anticipated that we will have a small team of champions ready to offer support in many communities in early January. However, take up has been lower than anticipated in the Salisbury, Wilton and Tisbury areas and we are keen to encourage more applicants from these communities in particular. For further details about these volunteering opportunities or to apply online, please visit the following page of our website:

<http://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/wiltshireonline/rol-desc-application-forms/>

## **Wiltshire Online Webpages:**

The site has now been redesigned and provides clearer access to information. A new section about the rollout of superfast broadband will be released after contact signature and we hope will provide a useful source of information.

I will write to you again in the new year with a further update.

Ian Baker

Wiltshire Online Programme Manager