

Wiltshire Online

Area Board Update – November 2016

Background

The Wiltshire Online programme is designed to provide a fibre broadband service to those premises that commercial providers consider to be financially non-viable. Without Wiltshire Council's investment, approximately 40% of Wiltshire would not have access to superfast broadband. The Council's approach is designed to deliver fibre broadband to the greatest number of premises for the budget available.

To date over 83,000 homes and businesses have access to fibre broadband due to Wiltshire Council's Wiltshire Online investment.

The Intervention Area – Where We Can Invest

The Wiltshire Online project must comply with EU State Aid law to ensure that public money is invested appropriately. As a first step to ensure compliance, Wiltshire Online conducted an Open Market Review with the communications' industry to establish the current broadband infrastructure (basic broadband and Next Generation Access (NGA)) already in place in Wiltshire and where there were plans for investment in such infrastructure in the coming three years. The areas that were not going to be targeted commercially formed what is known as our 'Intervention Area' and it is where, according to EU State Aid law, we are allowed to invest public money in.

To find out if your postcode is in the Intervention Area, you can use the Postcode Checker on the Wiltshire Online website – www.wiltshireonline.org.

Once the Intervention Area had been defined, we looked to BT to design the rollout. When we embarked on the programme in 2012 the broadband gap in Wiltshire was significant and we were aware that unfortunately our investment could not benefit every premises. With this in mind, and knowing Wiltshire Council needed to do something to reduce the gap, the rollout was designed on a 'Best Value for Money' basis - in summary to as many premises as possible with the funds available.

Contract 1 – Update on Progress

Contract 1 is now build complete. The Council has received the final financial claim from BT and the Wiltshire Online delivery team is now working with Broadband Delivery UK (BDUK), Department of Culture, Media and Sport on a robust contract closure and assurance process over the next four months. This process will help to ratify any under-spend in the contract which will then be used to extend our fibre footprint further.

Contract 2 – Update on Progress

Contract 2 commenced March 2016 and will bring a superfast fibre service to over 5000 premises.

Contract 2 is progressing though at a slower pace than Contract 1. As the build enters more rural areas, the challenge becomes greater. For example, fibre cabinets require a power connection and getting power to this new infrastructure can prove problematical.

However, despite these additional challenges, the Wiltshire Online delivery team remain confident that Contract 2 rollout will complete in summer 2017 as planned.

Gain Share

There is a gain share clause in both contracts that brings additional funds back into the contract investment pot to allow the council to extend its build footprint.

Gain share is calculated on the rate of service take-up via the infrastructure deployed through the publically funded Wiltshire Online programme. To date take-up rates on Contract 1 has exceeded expectations. This success has resulted in a gain share proposal from BT to the value of £2.8m which will result in additional build bringing fibre broadband to approximately 3,500 new premises.

The Wiltshire Online delivery team is currently reviewing the proposal for these additional 3,500 premises to ensure it adheres to State Aid principles, represents good value for money, serves premises not yet receiving a good service and that the rate of delivery is achievable.

The Wiltshire Online team is currently working with BDUK (Broadband Delivery UK) and it is hoped that the review can be finished and an announcement regarding the new deployment made very soon. Once we have confirmation of the additional postcodes that will be served as part of the gain share investment, these will be published on the Wiltshire Online website.

Further Broadband Opportunities - Ultrafast Broadband

Wiltshire secured £2m from BDUK's South West Ultrafast Fund and £1m match funding has been secured from the Swindon and Wiltshire Local Enterprise Partnership (SWLEP). The Wiltshire Online delivery team is working closely with Procurement, Legal, BDUK and central government's National Competence Centre with regards the completion of a State Aid compliant and robust procurement exercise.

As previously explained the Intervention Area for Ultrafast will be defined as per EU State Aid Law to ensure that currently unserved premises not in any future commercial build plans will be considered.

The Wiltshire Online team hope to launch the Invitation to Tender (ITT) in the coming weeks with an expectation that the procurement will be completed in spring 2017.

Better Broadband Subsidy Scheme

The scheme is intended to deliver central government's Universal Service Commitment to ensure that homes and businesses have access to download speeds of at least 2Mbps. If premises are not in any of our current plans to receive a fibre broadband service and currently receive less than 2Mbps, then the Better Broadband Scheme might be an option.

This scheme can offer support towards the cost of the equipment and installation of a wireless or satellite broadband connection. If premises are eligible, the resident will be issued with a code that can be redeemed with approved suppliers and which is worth £300 - £350 towards the initial cost.

The vouchers can lend themselves to supporting community solutions if there are multiple premises with access to speeds of less than 2Mbps. The vouchers, whilst they have no monetary value, may be aggregated and put towards a community solution with an approved supplier.

Once an application has been received, the Wiltshire Online team will complete a series of eligibility checks to confirm whether the home or business will feature in the superfast broadband roll-out. Based on these checks, the team will advise whether or not the premises will be eligible to benefit from the scheme.

More information and an online application form can be found on the Wiltshire Online website on the 'Better Broadband Scheme' page.

'When Can I Get It' Registration Service

On the Wiltshire Online website, there is an option for residents to register their details with Wiltshire Online which means that one of the team will email when fibre broadband is available. We would encourage residents to sign up to the service as the quickest way of finding out when fibre broadband is in the area.

Further Information

Further information about the Wiltshire Online programme including a postcode checker, FAQs and updates by exchange area can be found on the Wiltshire Online website – www.wiltshireonline.org.

For specific queries, please contact the team at: broadband@wiltshire.gov.uk