

Councillors Briefing Note No. 315

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WILTSHIRE ONLINE PROGRAMME – BROADBAND UPDATE

On 1 November 2016 Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee received an update on the delivery of superfast broadband in Wiltshire from Cllr George Jeans, Scrutiny Member representative on the project board. Further information was also provided by Cllr John Thomson, Cabinet Member for Highways and Broadband. Please see below for the latest update on broadband for Wiltshire.

Summary:

- To date 83,000 homes and business now have access to fibre broadband
- Additional build announced to serve a further 5000 premises
- Additional funding secured to procure an Ultrafast broadband solution

What is Wiltshire Online?

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 Wiltshire Online Invest

The Wiltshire Online programme 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.

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 all 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 bring fibre broadband to as many premises as possible with the funds available.

Contract 1 – Update on progress

Contract 1 is now 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.

Contract 2 – Update on progress

Contract 2 commenced March 2016 and will bring a superfast fibre service to more than 5,000 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 remains confident that Contract 2 rollout will complete in summer 2017 as planned.

Additional Build 5,000 new premises will benefit.

There is a gain share clause in the current broadband contract that brings additional funds back into the contract investment pot to allow the council to extend its build footprint. More than a third of those able to access the new technology as a result of the Wiltshire Online roll-out have already opted for an upgrade. This high demand has helped to trigger further reinvestment through the county's partnership.

We have updated the Wiltshire Online website with the additional postcodes that now feature in our extended high level build plans and would encourage residents to visit the website for the latest update.

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 to complete 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 build plans will be considered.

The Invitation to Tender (ITT) has been launched inviting broadband suppliers to bid. We expect the procurement to be completed in spring 2017.

Better Broadband Subsidy Scheme

The scheme is intended to deliver central government's Universal Service Commitment to ensure that all homes and businesses have access to download speeds of at least 2Mbps. If premises are not in any current plans to receive a fibre broadband service (either through Wiltshire Online or as part of a commercial build) 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 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 their area.

Additional comments from Cllr George Jeans, Scrutiny Representative on the Superfast Broadband project board

"The small team administering this £20 million plus project have done well in my opinion. To date over 83,000 homes and businesses have access to fibre-optic broadband due to Wiltshire Council's Wiltshire Online investment. This is a great overall achievement."

UK wide broadband and new housing developments – additional information from Cllr Jeans

Broadband is increasingly considered by residents as a vital utility but this has yet to be supported by a change in the legislation with regards to new build premises.

Apart from the Wiltshire Online programme, the Government has worked with Openreach - BT's local access network business - and the Home Builders Federation (HBF) on an agreement which aims to deliver superfast broadband connectivity to new build properties in the UK.

The new deal will see fibre based broadband offered to all new developments either for free or as part of a co-funded initiative. It is estimated that more than half of all new build properties can be connected to fibre broadband free of charge to developers.

As part of the agreement, Openreach is introducing an online planning tool for homebuilders. This will tell them whether properties in a given development can be connected to fibre for free, or if a contribution is needed from the developer to jointly fund the deployment of the local fibre network.

When the scheme was launched earlier this year, BT Openreach offered free connections to any development of over 100 premises. As of the next few weeks, this free offering will be extended to any development of 30 premises or over (link to more info [here](#)).

Central government has also acknowledged that while they are supportive of the BT Openreach initiative, there will be a limited number of new premises that are located in very hard to reach areas and that smaller developers in particular may need to consider a range of suppliers offering different technologies to achieve superfast connectivity.

It should be noted that while the government has worked with BT Openreach on this initiative, there are several broadband providers across the UK who can and do provide broadband infrastructure to new build homes. Wiltshire Council does not endorse one fibre provider over another with regards to new build developments.

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