

## Agenda Item No.7

### Digital Inclusion and Superfast Broadband Across Wiltshire

Wiltshire Council is investing in digital inclusion and access to super-fast broadband to support homes and business throughout the county.

Currently not all parts of Wiltshire have the same access to broadband. This is due to the fact that Wiltshire is a large rural county and it is uneconomic in some areas to supply broadband and the next generation superfast broadband to homes and businesses. Around 5% of all households currently receive a poor service with very slow broadband speeds and over half of all premises are unlikely to receive superfast broadband by 2015. It means if nothing is done a significant number of residents and businesses will find it increasingly difficult to take advantage of the internet and the wide range of on-line services available.

Wiltshire Council has recognised the importance of broadband access and has decided to invest £16m in improving access to digital services in areas which would otherwise miss out. This investment along with government grant and additional investment from the telecoms industry will generate over £30m of funds. It is intended this will go a long way towards eliminating the so called 'digital divide' across communities. The council has set a target of 85% and possibly rising to 95% (pending government funding) of all premises to have superfast broadband availability by 2015.

But supporting superfast broadband access is only one part of the Council's wider digital inclusion project.

In 2010, over 30 million or 60% of all adults in the UK accessed the internet nearly every day and yet nearly 20% of the population have never used the internet. Being on-line and using technology is becoming an increasingly regular and important factor, for work, learning or recreational use. Good digital literacy skills and access to technology allows us to benefit in many different ways such as saving money through on-line shopping and paying bills. Access to the internet allows businesses to develop the use of on-line communications, publicity and sales and can be particularly important in rural locations.

### Objectives

The digital inclusion project has three objectives which together form a strong basis to support a wide range of other initiatives especially in promoting economic growth, tackling social disadvantage, and in achieving a low carbon society.

They are:

#### **1. To improve access to broadband for citizens and businesses in Wiltshire.**

All premises within Wiltshire to have access to a minimum broadband service of 2Mbps achieving the Government's goal to ensure delivery of Standard Broadband to virtually all

communities in the UK. A minimum of 85%, (possibly 95%) of premises will be able to access the higher performing next generation superfast broadband access by 2015.

This will achieve:

- Much faster internet access which will improve peoples 'experience' of the technology and increase their opportunities to participate in social networking, using streamed media, video conferencing, online banking and shopping, local government services. This has many knock-on effects and benefits which could include for example, reducing people's social isolation, providing telecare and telehealth for the elderly, saving money, minimising the need to travel.
- For businesses it allows increased use of on-line tools, improves communication and marketing to customers, and greater flexibility in working location. It can help business viability especially for small-medium sized firms and overcome the disadvantage of being located in more remote rural areas.
- The Council will also benefit, as it will allow its staff to work more effectively from home or community based locations, reducing the need for costly central office premises.

## **2. To increase the uptake and usage of council on-line services.**

The council's website presence will be developed further to improve its capability to offer a wider range of interactive on-line services. Promotion will also be undertaken to increase demand and take up of our on-line services.

This will achieve:

- Improved delivery of local services and communication with residents, which will provide 24-7 access. The demand for on-line council services will be increased, allowing staff to spend more time on more complex issues and cases requiring their expertise. It will offer the potential to make efficiency savings eg in transactional services and could increase the income received by the council.
- Support for the uptake of free web based productivity and communication resources to allow new or unconfident users to have access to a digital "toolbox" of resources.
- Improving the information available to the public about the range of connectivity services available across Wiltshire that would help to make better informed choices.

## **3. To ensure that everyone has the opportunity to become digitally literate and confident users of technology.**

Communities will be supported through the use of volunteers to provide hands on support for digital literacy. Small and medium businesses will also be supported through economic partnerships to make the best use of technology including on-line purchasing and communications.

This will achieve:

- More adults being able to use technology and the internet, with fewer feeling 'digitally excluded', especially amongst the elderly and those on low incomes. It can also help people in getting jobs, as most employers now require digital skills.

- More demand for internet access and services, especially superfast broadband connectivity.
- To ensure that every adult has the opportunity to become digitally literate and confident users of technology. (Phased in conjunction with the superfast broadband rollout in each area)
- A volunteer programme will be established (schools, local community groups and business) that will offer a menu of support and also work with Area Boards to identify specific needs and opportunities for support linked to opportunities arising from localism projects and to the customer focus programme. (Phased in conjunction with the superfast broadband rollout in each area)
- Support from business to provide skills around day-to-day use of technology e.g. “how to do on-line banking”, “how to do the weekly shop on-line” will be supported through partnership with local business and Race On-Line 2012 (<http://raceonline2012.org/>) to provide digital literacy support at the workplace.

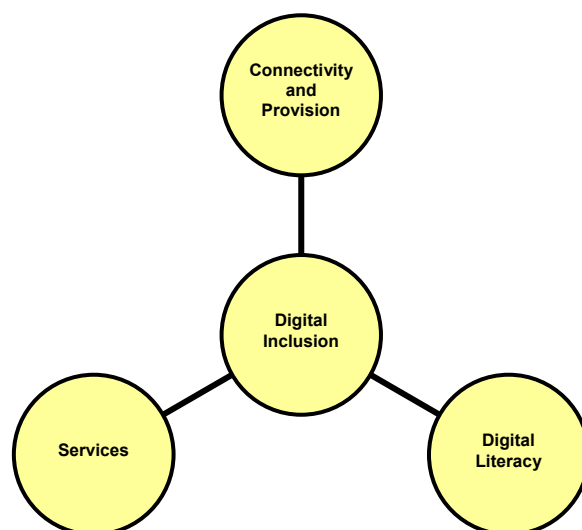
How will the areas be selected and prioritise for support? Firstly, to ensure that the telecoms market is not distorted in Wiltshire, funding to improve the infrastructure can only be provided in areas where it’s not economically viable for the industry to fund any upgrades, i.e. where superfast broadband is not planned for rollout. A range of data for all these communities within Wiltshire will be collected, for example the number of businesses, number of household, employment and housing opportunities.

### Timescales

The project aims and funding was approved by full council as part of the business plan and financial plan in February 2011 and is one of the council’s key areas for investment.

Support for digital literacy will start in pilot phase this summer. A procurement will be managed during 2011-12 so to allow rollout from April 2012 of superfast broadband

The digital Inclusion project’s three objectives are complementary and together form a strong basis to support growth in the economy, social inclusion and educational outcomes.



## **Background**

### **Broadband connectivity**

Broadband coverage and performance in Wiltshire is poor particularly when compared with more urban councils. There are significant cost challenges for the telecoms market to provide higher speed broadband connectivity. Often the smaller towns and villages are not commercially viable for short term improvement over the next five years. Approximately 59% of premises across Wiltshire will not benefit from superfast broadband as they are in areas where it is uneconomical for the telecoms industry to invest. Without some form of direct public and community intervention they will continue to receive an inadequate service.

Detailed research is underway to map broadband coverage and performance and this will be combined with other information on potential demand and socio-economic factors to pinpoint the localities where additional investment is needed. The council will use this intelligence to develop a proposal to invest in broadband and enter into a contract with the telecoms industry to upgrade the infrastructure in these areas. In this way, the council can ensure that it targets resources so that the majority of communities in Wiltshire are able to access super fast broadband services by 2015.

It will work closely with communities and all partners such as area boards, economic communities and social enterprises.

### **Some key facts and issues include:**

- 5% of households in Wiltshire cannot receive broadband speeds of at least 2mbps. High broadband speeds are really only readily available in the larger towns.
- Small and medium sized businesses are likely to be more successful and grow more quickly if they have good internet access and presence. In fact a number of surveys have shown that many small businesses report that they would not exist without the internet.
- The lack of computer and internet access can contribute to social disadvantage, especially for the unemployed, elderly, and those with disabilities.

### **Public on-line services**

The council's website is well positioned to be developed further to improve the range and scope of services that can be accessed on-line. The focus will be on making the top 20 most requested services fully transactional, providing real time information, and in tailoring information and services to where users live. This will have many benefits for both the council and users including cost efficiencies, and choice and ease of access at any time of day or night.

The website will also be used to promote this project, outlining progress and how to get involved. It will be interactive and include broadband speed calculators, surveys and digital literacy support available.

### **Broadband usage and demand**

The use of technology can have huge social and economic benefits. However, a large number of people, approximately 65,000 in Wiltshire, especially in certain groups, do not use the internet due to a variety of reasons which may include cost, limited awareness of its benefits, or a lack of knowledge in how to use the technology.

Area boards, schools, libraries, volunteer groups and local communities will be critical partners to help engage with people wishing to gain digital literacy skills. This will link closely to the improvements to connectivity.

### **Some key facts and issues include:**

- Around 60% of all people in the UK access the internet every day. But 19% of the population has never used the internet. In Wiltshire this equates to about 68,000 people. These people are increasingly disadvantaged. For example, it is estimated that people who do not use the internet miss out on £560 savings per year in shopping and paying bills online
- Most new jobs require digital skills.
- Access to computers at home can improve children's learning and makes it easier for parents to get involved in their child's education.

### **Links to the national agenda and other council projects**

Digital inclusion and improving access to broadband is a national and local priority forming a part of the coalition government programme, the Wiltshire Community Plan, and the Wiltshire Council Business Plan 2011-15.

The government has set national digital connectivity targets and is channelling its work and investment through Broadband Delivery UK (BDUK). It supports many government initiatives including for example, supporting the goal to ensure the country has the best Superfast Broadband in Europe by the end of this parliament (2015) and also; to ensure delivery of standard broadband to virtually all communities in the UK within the lifetime of this parliament (2015). The digital inclusion project also has strong links to the achievement of the big society, improvements to public sector efficiency, and open government with the publication of more on-line information.

Locally the digital inclusion project helps to support the achievement of many other initiatives both within the council and in our work with other partner agencies.

- Considerable work is ongoing to protect and promote business development and investment in Wiltshire. The need for good broadband connectivity is becoming increasingly important for business success.
- The customer focus programme aims to change the way customers access our services, with the default that 'we go to the customer' and not 'the customer comes to us'. This means having appointments in people's homes and other community

settings plus the use of virtual face to face facilities in each community area. Superfast broadband will be a prerequisite to make this work allowing access to centrally held information and data.

- The campus and operational delivery programme will reduce the number of council offices and other buildings across Wiltshire. It means more staff will work remotely from home and in other community settings which will require fast and reliable broadband access.
- Protecting and safeguarding vulnerable adults is another area of investment for the council. This will be achieved through increasing services that help people to live independently in their own homes. The use of telecare and internet based technology will be a vital tool in this work, with active monitoring of patient conditions and virtual face to face consultations. However, it all relies on having a good broadband infrastructure in place, especially in rural areas.
- The Local development Framework and the production of the new Wiltshire Core Strategy will seek to ensure all new developments include broadband connectivity.
- A range of energy efficiency projects are underway to reduce carbon emissions from homes and businesses. Technology and access to the internet is helping to do this, reducing commuting and the need to travel and in new internet based products such as smart meters which help to monitor and reduce home energy usage.

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