

Councillors' Briefing Note No. 141

Department: DCE

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Wiltshire Online Programme – Feb to April news update

Summary of Progress

In my last update to you I was pleased to tell you that we had awarded the contract for superfast broadband to BT. Since January the Great Western Broadband (GWB) superfast rollout has been progressing quickly through the initial planning stages with BT and South Gloucestershire Council. We have also made good progress in a number of other areas across the Wiltshire Online Programme, the headlines are:

- All libraries in Wiltshire now have the Wiltshire Online public Wi-Fi operating and available.
- Over 40 volunteers and learners have been recruited in the last 2 months following an article in Your Wiltshire Magazine.
- The pilot project with Age UK Salisbury to provide low cost refurbished laptops has now been launched with nearly all of the 30 units being reserved within the first two months.

Public Wi-Fi

All hub sites and offices that have customer areas now provide public Wi-Fi. We have achieved our milestone to have all libraries offer this service and have over 3,600 registered users. Wiltshire Libraries have been very supportive and feel the availability of Wi-Fi compliments their service and customers' needs.

The next phase is to provide public Wi-Fi to all Youth and Community Centres over the next 6 months

Digital Literacy

Lack of skills is a huge barrier to getting online with over 68,000 adults in Wiltshire having never been online. Many more have tried and been put off due to a lack of knowledge or confidence.

The response to the Digital Literacy article in the Your Wiltshire Magazine has resulted in over 40 volunteers and learner enquiries. This has been the most successful outcome from a single publicity event. The next stage will be to allocate volunteers to the learners wherever possible and to request the prospective volunteers to submit applications.

A project involving sixth formers from Devizes School has been launched. This has involved providing volunteer training to 24 students who then provide 1:1 computer support, after school at Devizes Library on Mondays. This is organised on a rotational basis to allow all students to participate between now and the end of the school's summer term. Initial feedback from the learners and students has been very positive. A quote from the local volunteer coordinator illustrates this success:

"I thought the session went really well again and we had some very good feedback from the learners about the knowledge and ability of the students. I believe at least one of the learners is going to contact the school directly to say thank you. One of the new learners this week, an 80 year old lady who was working with Alice, said to me "I've learnt lots & I've had fun. I'll be back next week".

GWB Broadband rollout

On 30 January 2013 Wiltshire Council, in partnership with South Gloucester Council, awarded the contract to provide superfast broadband to BT.

Over the next three years we will ensure that 91% of all premises across Wiltshire are able to access superfast broadband and that all premises are able to access a standard broadband service by March 2016.

The joint investment for this programme includes £15.5 million from Wiltshire Council and £4.6 m from Central Government. In addition, BT is investing £12.8m. This means that our rural communities will benefit from the same infrastructure, service providers and prices as people living in most towns.

The new superfast broadband services will give speeds of up to 80Mbps download and 20 MBs upload depending on distance from the cabinet. The significant majority of premises will be able to access speeds of over 50Mbps.

Our deployment of superfast broadband is now in the planning stage involving service areas from Planning and Highways to ensure an efficient and effective delivery. During this period BT will be physically inspecting and surveying the existing infrastructure, such as the green street cabinets and underground ducting. Once this work has been completed we will be clear about the extent and timing of

the rollout. We will be releasing further information about timescales and rollout plans in May.

Several communities have made contact with the team to enquire whether local broadband projects may change the council's investment in their area. In particular would the council withdraw any deployment should a community project go ahead? In these cases the intervention area would remain unchanged and be subject to the same ongoing planning and survey work. However some communities may wish to bid for local project funding from the Rural Communities Broadband Fund (RCBF). There are a number of caveats to this funding, for example investment from the council's project cannot be used and the community will need to establish its own project team. Information about this fund is available from:

<http://rdpenetwork.defra.gov.uk/funding-sources/rural-community-broadband-fund>

If you would like to discuss this further please contact me using my email address at the start of this briefing.

We will ensure that Area Boards, Parishes and Councillors are updated regularly about the project's rollout plans and timescales. The Wiltshire Online website has the latest information about the rollout including a helpful video and map showing where we are able to target investment.

Low cost laptops

Wiltshire Online is working with Age UK Salisbury District to distribute low cost laptops to those over 65+ where the cost of equipment is a barrier to getting online.

Wiltshire Council donated 150 laptops to the scheme. Each laptop has been wiped and refurbished with a Microsoft operating system, Libre Office and commonly used software. Each laptop, along with a case and mouse, will be made available at a cost of under £60.00. Costs have been kept low as only the cost of refurbishment is passed on.

The pilot with Age UK Salisbury is going very well. Ten laptops were issued to recipients within the first few weeks of the scheme's launch. Age UK's assistance in providing the "get you started" help for the residents has been greatly appreciated.

Most recently Carer Support Wiltshire has agreed to work in partnership with Wiltshire Online to ensure the full time carers they work with can access a low cost laptop and also support. A pilot similar to the one with Age UK will start shortly after Easter.

General queries

The Wiltshire Online website (www.wiltshireonline.org) is intended to be the first point of information about the programme and will be regularly updated throughout the course of the programme.

Ian Baker

Wiltshire Online Programme Manager