

Connecting Devon and Somerset (CDS) Programme Update

Report of the Head of Economy, Enterprise and Skills

1. Update on Phase One

Connecting Devon and Somerset's contractor BT reported that a further 7,000 premises were connected to fibre broadband in Q2, July to September end. This brings the Total Homes Passed (THP) for phase 1 premises to around 317,000, of which 264,000 premises are capable of accessing superfast broadband. Further to this BT have assured the CDS Board that they are confident the programme will deliver the contracted level of superfast connections (circa 277,000) by the end of the deployment phase in December 2016.

BT are bringing new technologies and cabinets into the programme in these final few months as they connect remaining areas to the fibre network and maximise delivery from areas that have already received a connection. Over 100 new structures have gone through planning for the last quarter and BT are working hard to resolve any outstanding wayleaves and other issues so they can achieve their targets by the end of the year. 119 further cabinets are in various stages of build to be completed in the next few months as part of the programme which has so far delivered over 1,400 cabinets to date.

Commercial build has been reported as below what was planned and this is likely to impact on the achievement of the Government's 90% superfast target by the end of the year. Therefore while CDS expect to meet its obligations to deliver its own superfast target, the wider 90% commitment is at risk. The target is dependent on commercial delivery, and shortfall by commercial suppliers will result in this target being underachieved.

Take up of fibre service is almost at 28%, a 3% increase since the last quarter. This increase can in part be attributed to a CDS marketing campaign which included a mailout of leaflets to over 143,000 live addresses in the last quarter, as well as press coverage and further proactive marketing by CDS and its partners such as cabinet stickers to indicate availability of a service. In total 576 demand stimulation events have been held in local areas across Devon and Somerset since the start of the programme and a further 253 public engagements have been attended by CDS and its partners. The high levels of take up will return more funding to CDS through the Gainshare agreement in the BT contract allowing further future investment for superfast delivery.

CDS are considering commissioning an interim evaluation report to provide definitive data on the benefits brought by the broadband programme and its initial economic impacts. The report will include a survey on businesses and residents, economic modelling of the financial returns, socio-economic studies over time and the wider impact on businesses. The finding would then be used to inform future parts of the programme and evidence any further funding CDS wished to apply for.

2. Phase Two - Airband

Over the past few weeks, Airband Community Internet, the contracted fixed wireless supplier for Dartmoor and Exmoor National Parks, have made the CDS team aware of a number of unforeseen difficulties affecting the installation of critical masts across both Dartmoor and Exmoor. The issues encountered include delays with power connections and agreeing wayleaves and land deals.

On Dartmoor a total of 33 masts have been built out of a target of 57. Of these 14 are live and a remaining 19 are ready to go live following the completion of 4 critical masts. In total around 1,000 premises can access a wireless service; however this figure could double by the end of the month once these critical masts are completed.

On Exmoor the build has picked up pace and a total of 32 masts have been completed out of a target of 53. Of these 2 are capable of offering a service and many of the remaining masts will go live following the completion of 2 critical masts. At this point we anticipate around 1,000 premises will be capable of receiving a wireless service.

The CDS team has requested a remedial plan from Airband and we are monitoring the situation closely. A verbal update will be provided to Scrutiny Members at the meeting.

A Ministerial visit is being planned at the end of November to view the build and see first-hand the challenges of rolling out this type of technology over protected landscapes. Some of the issues to be discussed include difficulties encountered with sharing masts between different operators.

Airband Community Internet have promised to install wireless broadband, free of charge, to village halls across the National Parks. To date 4 installations have taken place with a further 2 orders booked in. 4 further village hall sites are being surveyed to ascertain feasibility.

The CDS team is focusing marketing activity to increase take-up. To date around 900 premises have been mailed directly to inform residents and businesses that a wireless service is available in their area. At present take up is at around 5.5%.

3. Phase Two – New Procurement

The CDS partnership launched their tender for phase 2 outside the National Parks back in July following 12 months of dialogue and engagement with the broadband sector. With £39.5m public sector investment secured it is expected that there will be delivery of Next Generation Access broadband services (a minimum of 30 Mbps) and ultrafast broadband (speeds greater than 100 Mbps) to many tens of thousands more homes and businesses across Devon and Somerset in predominantly rural areas over the next phase. This will contribute significantly to meeting the government's targets for superfast broadband coverage.

The tender opportunity will seek as much Next Generation Access coverage as possible across 6 lots by the end of 2017. Suppliers will also be asked to ensure full service commencement by 2019.

The deadline for submissions has now passed and the CDS team can confirm a number of bids have been received covering all lots. It is anticipated that all evaluations will be completed by late November. The contract awards will take place in Mid-December at which point the CDS Board will announce the successful contractors.

4. Voucher Scheme

CDS has committed to ensuring that all businesses and residents can have access to at least 2 Mbps by end of 2016. To support this, the CDS team has set up its own Broadband Voucher Scheme which is live and processing applications.

Anyone within the CDS area that currently has a broadband speed of less than 2 Mbps can qualify for a voucher for £500 to go towards the installation cost of a new alternative broadband connection. Residents and businesses can choose their supplier from an

approved list which includes satellite, wireless and fibre providers; and each solution will guarantee at least 10 Mbps download speed.

BDUK have confirmed that the CDS voucher scheme is the most successful in England with over 280 installations to date. 3400 applications for vouchers have been made with 2400 vouchers approved so far. Many recipients are looking to use the voucher to encourage suppliers to deliver for the whole village or community. The deadline for voucher applications is 30th November to ensure that there is sufficient time for installations to occur before the end of the financial year.

A verbal update will be provided at the November Scrutiny meeting.

Keri Denton
Head of Economy, Enterprise and Skills

Electoral Divisions: All

Cabinet Member for Economy, Growth and Cabinet Liaison for Exeter: Councillor Andrew Leadbetter

Chief Officer for Communities, Public Health, Environment & Prosperity: Dr Virginia Pearson

Local Government Act 1972: List of Background Papers

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Background Paper	Date	File Reference
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Nil

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