

Connecting Devon and Somerset (CDS) Programme Update

Report of the Head of Economy, Enterprise and Skills

1. Phase One

Connecting Devon and Somerset's contractor BT reported that the number of superfast homes and businesses connected to date stands at 268,000 premises. BT are predicting missing the Superfast Connection Target by a small number circa 1700 premises. 99.5% of the contract will complete on time and the small number not achieved will be met by the end of March. CDS is working with BT to reduce the delay and is in the process of agreeing a Remedial Plan. Communities likely to be impacted upon will be communicated to and any help to resolve difficulties, such as wayleaves sought.

Much of the deployment that will be completed in the first quarter of 2017 is Fibre to the Premise and this requires numerous wayleaves and highways notifications which have in many instances been difficult for BT to obtain in the final stages of the contract. CDS will work with BT to develop a communications strategy to ensure that communities are fully aware of the latest position.

Take up of fibre service is just over 30%, compared to 28% in November. This increase can in part be attributed to CDS marketing campaigns which include a mailout of leaflets to over 143,000 live addresses, press coverage, stickering cabinets to indicate that a service is available and providing updates to the parishes. 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.

2. Phase Two - Airband

As reported to the Scrutiny meeting in November, Airband Community Internet, the fixed wireless supplier for Dartmoor and Exmoor National Parks, had been experiencing a number of issues hampering the rollout of wireless services across both Moors. Since then the CDS Programme Board has agreed a Remedial Plan which sets out the steps the provider intends to take to reach their target. The plan shows how Airband intend to extend coverage to 3980 premises by the end of 2016, reaching their contractual target by the end of March 2017. Airband will also provide additional coverage to 1,000 premises across Dartmoor and Exmoor and these will be brought into the contract for the Moors through Change Control.

At the time of writing, Airband had made services available to over 3,000 properties across the National Parks. 65 masts currently have been installed across Dartmoor and Exmoor with 21 so far offering a service.

Airband Community Internet are working with Dartmoor and Exmoor National Park Authorities to process the final planning applications for outstanding sites. Further works are ongoing to connect the others into the network and install the further infrastructure needed to complete the delivery. Presently the project is scheduled to deliver its targeted numbers within by early March. The final coverage on the moors will infill those areas that have been left out of the phase one delivery by BT, and as we near the end of phase one CDS and Airband will work together to ensure delivery goes to the areas that need it and any overspill is minimised.

Currently take-up stands at 4.4%. This has dipped slightly since November due to the large increase in the number of premises that are able to take a service and the time lag between an area going live and people taking out a new broadband subscription.

A verbal update on progress will be presented at the January 2017 Scrutiny meeting.

3. Phase Two - Procurement

The CDS partnership has concluded its procurement of suppliers to deliver phase two of the programme outside the National Parks. At the time of writing this report, one provider had been elevated to preferred supplier status for five lots and due diligence is being progressed with a lead bidder for another lot. An update on contracts awarded and coverage will be provided at the Scrutiny meeting.

One of these lots (in the Bath & North East Somerset area) is currently the subject of a legal challenge and this process needs to conclude before a contract may be awarded.

This second phase has a secured £39.5m budget from the public sector which is expected to be at least match funded by suppliers. 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 phase two programme will run until December 2019 with each contract mobilised in January 2017.

The phase 2 funding package includes £4m from the SW Ultrafast fund and this will be targeted at areas with high business density to deliver broadband speeds in excess of 100Mbps. The CDS team, working with the DCLG, has submitted a full application for £4.6m ERDF funding and is looking to complete the funding agreement. The government has now announced that all multi-year projects with signed contracts or funding agreements in place, and projects to be signed in the ordinary course of business before the Autumn Statement, will be fully funded, even when these projects continue beyond the UK's departure from the EU. Opportunities for further funding are also being sought through the LEP's Growth Deal 3 bid.

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 set up its own highly successful Broadband Voucher Scheme. The scheme has now closed to new applications, though installations can be completed up until the end of March 2017. In total over 6,200 Devon and Somerset residents have applied for vouchers. A massive influx of applications at the close of the scheme means the CDS team has a further 1,200 to process, many of which will be approved.

The CDS voucher scheme is the most successful in England with over 400 installations to date and 3,700 vouchers have been approved so far. Some recipients are looking to use the voucher to encourage suppliers to deliver for the whole village or community and we hope to have a number of NGA compliant community schemes in progress come the New Year complementing our phase two delivery.

The voucher provides £500 towards the installation cost of a new alternative broadband connection for properties within the CDS area who receive speeds less than 2Mbps download. Residents and businesses can choose their supplier from an approved list which

includes 4G, satellite, wireless and fibre providers; and each solution will guarantee at least 10 Mbps download speed.

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Electoral Divisions: All

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Chief Officer for Communities, Public Health, Environment and 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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