

RURAL BROADBAND WORKING GROUP

Economic and Community Development Advisory Committee – 18 June 2013

Report of the: Chief Executive Designate

Status: For Consideration

Key Decision: No

This report supports the Key Aim of A Dynamic Economy

Portfolio Holder: Cllr. Hogarth

Head of Service: Head of Community Development – Lesley Bowles

Recommendation: That Members agree terms of reference and membership of a Rural Broadband Working Group to report to the Advisory Committee on the following areas:

- a) work already undertaken in order to improve broadband in the District to date
 - b) additional work that might usefully be undertaken by the Council
 - c) consideration as to whether the Council has a role in promoting private broadband provision through small providers
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Reason for recommendation: to enable a small working group of Members to meet more frequently and report back to the Advisory Committee on it's findings for consideration

Introduction

1. Members are asked to consider setting up a Rural Broadband Working Group to report back its findings to the Advisory Committee on a regular basis. Members should note that any working group will last no longer than the municipal year it is set up unless reconstituted the following year.
2. Members need to consider and agree the number and membership of the Rural Broadband Working Group. Members of the Council not sitting on this Committee may be asked to join the working group and bring appropriate expertise to the group.

Draft Terms of Reference

3. Draft terms of reference have been drawn up below for Members consideration.
 - a. The membership of the Working Group to consist of 5 Councillors and made up of, where appropriate, Members from the Advisory Committee and other appropriate members of the Council with relevant experience

- b. The Working Group to be set up for the consideration of the following only:
 - i. any work already undertaken in order to improve broadband in the District to date
 - ii. any additional work that might usefully be undertaken by the Council
 - iii. consideration as to whether the Council has a role in promoting private broadband provision through small providers
- c. The Working Group to regularly report back on its findings to the Advisory Committee via 'Action Sheets'

Background

4. The Government has made it one of their top aims to transform the broadband infrastructure in this country by 2015. They are investing £530 million to stimulate commercial investment in broadband infrastructure. The government's ambition is to get superfast access to 90% of residents and businesses, with the remaining 10% to get a minimum 2mpbs service.
5. One of the priorities in the new Sevenoaks District Community Plan includes improving broadband connectivity by helping to prove the need and demand for fast broadband, applying for funding to support rural communities in accessing superfast broadband and supporting local communities to find broadband solutions.

BDUK- Kent County Council

6. Local authorities at County and Unitary level (in this case Kent County Council) are responsible for taking forward the local delivery of broadband projects. Each area has set out their proposed delivery in their Local Broadband Plans (LBP).
7. KCC is investing £10 million to support this project, which has been matched by £9.87 million from the government. It is expected that the network operator which wins the contract will contribute a significant sum towards the costs of the project. The KCC project has two central aims and these are to:
 - Ensure that every single property in Kent is able to access a broadband connection with a minimum speed of 2 mbps.
 - Try and connect as many properties as possible to a superfast broadband service- i.e. a minimum of 24 mbps.

The current key tasks for the project team are:

- Evaluation and clarification of Tender submissions (January 2013)
- Submission of local state aid application to DCMS (February 2013)
- Completion of DCMS Checkpoint C 'readiness to contract' (March 2013)

- Contract award (April 2013)
8. It is expected that we will find out the exact delivery times and intervention area at some point after the awarding of the contract. This may not occur for many months as the private provider has to undergo significant surveying before confirming the project area.
 9. The District Council, through its Economic Development Officer, has supported this initiative by promoting the 'Make Kent Quicker' campaign through leaflets and posters aimed at individual communities in an attempt to encourage local people to indicate their support for broadband in their communities, thereby strengthening the case for better broadband in this District.

DEFRA Rural Community Broadband Fund

10. The Rural Community Broadband Fund (RCBF) is jointly funded by DEFRA and BDUK. It is specifically designed for the most rural and hard to reach communities. Sevenoaks District Council has made a number of bids for these funds. We currently have a full application submitted which was successful at the first stage and is now being considered at the second stage. If it were successful it would give a number of our rural areas in the District access to superfast broadband (Leigh, Chiddingstone, Penshurst, Hever and Cowden). It is anticipated that there will be a third round and SDC will continue to look at ways of supporting communities to bid for funds.

Internet Service Providers

11. In addition to the schemes mentioned above, it is possible for communities to work with smaller services providers. There are a number of such providers, including those that provide a 'soft dig' scheme in rural areas. Members may wish to explore whether these schemes might be an alternative provision in this District.

Key Implications

Financial

There are no financial implications for the scrutiny process

Community Impact and Outcomes

Communities may benefit from the outcome of the scrutiny if it leads to faster, better broadband.

Legal, Human Rights etc.

None associated with this report.

Resource (non-financial)

Member and staff time will need to be allocated to the process.

Equality Impacts

An equality impact assessment will be completed if there is a change in policy resulting from the in-depth review.

Sustainability Checklist

A sustainability checklist will be completed for any policy or actions arising from the in-depth review

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