

# TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

## COMMUNITIES ADVISORY BOARD

28 March 2013

### Report of the Chief Executive

#### Part 1- Public

#### Matters for Recommendation to Cabinet - Non-Key Decision (Decision may be taken by the Cabinet Member)

#### 1 LOCAL BROADBAND INITIATIVES

To provide an update on local initiatives aimed at enhancing broadband services in some rural parts of the borough.

##### 1.1 Background

1.1.1 Kent County Council is working with the government's broadband agency, Broadband Delivery UK (BDUK), to bring better broadband to Kent. Broadband infrastructure is essential for economic growth and efficient service delivery, yet there are some more rural areas within the borough that currently have poor broadband access and do not benefit from either superfast or basic broadband.

1.1.2 The purpose of this report is to update Members on the aims and timescale of the proposed bid to transform broadband infrastructure and to highlight anything further that we can do to facilitate the process to ensure the best possible outcome for residents.

##### 1.2 Aims of the Broadband Programme

1.2.1 The programme aims to transform broadband infrastructure in areas that would otherwise miss out. The target is for at least 90% of properties (business and residential) to be able to access superfast broadband services of at least 24 Mbps by 2015 and the remaining 10% have a basic level of at least 2mbps.

1.2.2 KCC is leading a procurement process to secure a single private sector delivery partner to co-fund and deliver the installation of broadband infrastructure across the area. This will provide a wholesale access broadband network allowing new retail broadband services to be available to businesses and residents to purchase.

1.2.3 The European Commission requires that local authorities only invest in areas where they can demonstrate there is no current or planned deployment of either standard or superfast broadband. These are termed "white areas" and they are the areas where it will be possible to invest with public subsidy. These areas are

mainly communities and properties in rural or remote areas that are not currently viable with private funding alone.

### **1.3 Timescale**

- 1.3.1 The expected timing of the announcement of the KCC contract award for the BDUK funded programme is April 2013. There are currently only two organisations bidding for the contract – Fujitsu and BT. The winning bidder will then work with KCC on detailed plans of the whole county to establish which areas will fall within the 90% target (i.e. those areas that will receive “superfast” broadband) and the remaining 10% which will only get the minimum 2Mbps. In reality this is likely to take 4-6 months. During a recent meeting with representatives from BT, in the event of BT being awarded the contract, they confirmed upgrades would be prioritised due to the limited funding. Areas considered lowest cost would be undertaken first, working down the list until the funding is spent. Remaining areas will not be upgraded under this programme.

### **1.4 Next steps**

- 1.4.1 To help evidence the demand for better broadband services, KCC have implemented a “Make Kent Quicker” campaign. It would be beneficial for residents, businesses and Parishes to be encouraged to sign up to the campaign, to highlight the demand in our area. Further promotion of this campaign could take place via Tonbridge Forum, Parish Partnership Panel and links from the Council website.
- 1.4.2 BT has a “Mobile fibre broadband showcase” which is a high-tech, specially adapted broadband demonstration facility. This has been designed to demonstrate how BT installs fibre optic broadband from the telephone exchange through to a customer’s premises. It also provides information on the green street side cabinets that would be used in the process. Consideration could be given to arranging for this facility to be brought to the borough to show to any interested parties.
- 1.4.3 An independent local initiative has arisen; Ultrafast Underriver, which aims to improve internet speed in Underriver and the surrounding areas. Within our borough this is likely to affect areas around Shipbourne, Plaxtol, Ightham and Borough Green. The group are trying to encourage “Gigaclear” an internet service provider, to move into the area. Rather than providing fibre optic cables to street side cabinets, Gigaclear are able to provide fibre direct to premises. Officers will monitor the ongoing development of this project within our area.

### **1.5 DEFRA Rural Community Broadband Fund (RCBF)**

- 1.5.1 DEFRA currently offer a Rural Community Broadband Fund (RCBF) for delivering superfast broadband (defined as capable of providing speeds greater than 24 Mbps) into the final 10% of the UK least likely to see such investment otherwise. The second round of this funding has now closed, however decisions on a third

round will be taken in response to round 2. This is a rural community scheme; however, Local Authorities may also apply on behalf of communities. Where this is the case, there must be clear demonstration of community engagement and support for the project. Further investigation into the RCBF would be worthwhile, particularly if there are significant areas within the borough which are not likely to fall within the 90% target.

## **1.6 Legal Implications**

- 1.6.1 The procurement process is currently underway. Until this is complete we are unable to get precise information on providers and confirmation of the areas likely to fall within the 90% target.

## **1.7 Financial and Value for Money Considerations**

- 1.7.1 Although there may be possible grant funding through the DEFRA RCBF, grant is paid in arrears, so if we were to pursue this we would need to demonstrate the ability to bankroll any project until the funds are received.

## **1.8 Risk Assessment**

- 1.8.1 N/A

## **1.9 Equality Impact Assessment**

- 1.9.1 See 'Screening for equality impacts' table at end of report

## **1.10 Recommendations**

- 1.10.1 That further local promotion of the “Make Kent Quicker” campaign be undertaken, via website and existing forums;
- 1.10.2 Further investigation be undertaken into the viability of having the “BT Mobile fibre broadband showcase” brought to the borough to provide greater awareness of the technologies available and information on the street side cabinets;
- 1.10.3 Further investigation into the DEFRA RCBF be undertaken to establish eligibility and likely benefits for our areas.

The Chief Executive confirms that the proposals contained in the recommendation(s), if approved, will fall within the Council's Budget and Policy Framework.

Background papers:

contact: Gill Fox

Nil

Julie Beilby  
Chief Executive

<b>Screening for equality impacts:</b>		
<b>Question</b>	<b>Answer</b>	<b>Explanation of impacts</b>
a. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper have potential to cause adverse impact or discriminate against different groups in the community?	No	
b. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper make a positive contribution to promoting equality?	Yes	Access to good broadband services can help to reduce social isolation and tackle disadvantage by increasing access to services and improving educational outcomes.
c. What steps are you taking to mitigate, reduce, avoid or minimise the impacts identified above?		

*In submitting this report, the Chief Officer doing so is confirming that they have given due regard to the equality impacts of the decision being considered, as noted in the table above.*