

**Economy and Enterprise
Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

19 December 2011

**Durham County Council's Digital
Durham Programme**



**Joint Report of Lorraine O'Donnell, Assistant Chief Executive and
Don McLure, Corporate Director Resources**

Purpose of the Report

- 1 To provide members with an update in relation to Durham County Council's Digital Durham programme prior to the presentation by Phil Jackman, Head of ICT Services focusing on background to the programme, progress to date and next steps.

Background

- 2 Members will recall that at the meeting of the Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on the 4 April 2011, a refresh of the Work Programme for 2011-2013 was considered within the context of the "Altogether Wealthier" priority theme of the Council Plan 2011-2014. As a result of this refresh the Digital Durham programme was identified for inclusion within the Committee's current Work Programme for 2011-2013.
- 3 A report considered by Members at the Cabinet Committee meeting on the 9 March, detailing proposed plans to provide next generation (superfast) broadband in County Durham highlighted that access to digital services through broadband is essential to provide services and information to businesses, customers and service users. This access is key to enabling a modern economy and a research and learning service to customers.
- 4 Current private sector business plans would extend next generation broadband coverage to only around 40% of the homes and businesses within the County. This would lead to significant disadvantage for the majority of residents and businesses within these areas. Without public sector intervention much of County Durham risks being left out of the knowledge economy.
- 5 The Digital Durham programme aims to ensure all homes, businesses and communities across the County have access to superfast broadband.

- 6 In August 2011, Broadband Delivery UK (BDUK), part of the Department for Business, Industry and Skills and a delivery vehicle for the Government's policies on broadband, had allocated the council an indicative grant of £7.79 million for the roll out of super fast broadband, with £6.93 million for County Durham and £0.86 million to cover areas of Gateshead close to the Durham/Gateshead border. The aim of BDUK is to ensure that the UK has next generation broadband coverage with BDUK funding provided on the provision of a local authority broadband plan.
- 7 ICT Services and Economic Development have been working together to identify the areas within the county that most require investment in next generation broadband. This is based upon a mixture of current broadband not-spots, planned commercial investment, planned council regeneration objectives and current delivery service demands. Due to the make up of the County and the mix of requirements, it is unlikely that one technology will be able to cover the whole of the County.
- 8 Durham County Council's plan is currently going through the approval process however there are still a number of conditions which need to be met by Durham County Council before the funds are awarded.
- 9 The Council will seek additional funding from other grant sources as well as including its own funding in order to fully match the BDUK grant. Further investment from an external private sector Partner will ensure that all areas in the County will benefit from the programme.

Current position

- 10 Meetings have taken place with organisations already active in delivering superfast broadband, such as British telecom, Virgin Media, Cable and Wireless, Fujitsu and Networks by Wireless.
- 11 In order to optimise publicity about the programme presentations to Area Action Partnership (AAP) have been delivered. These will provide local communities with an understanding of the programme and the potential that superfast broadband will bring to both residents and businesses. To date these meetings have provided useful feedback.
- 12 In addition Durham County Council has been asking for Local Broadband Champions (a voluntary role) to come forward to represent the Digital Durham programme locally within the community. The role of a Local Broadband Champion includes the following:
 - Communicating information about the Digital Durham programme and its progress in the local community.
 - Gather feedback where appropriate to ensure community views are understood and considered.
 - Gather information where appropriate which will help scope and deliver the Digital Durham programme.

- Promote the benefits of superfast broadband, generating interest and ideas on how the local community can benefit from its availability.
- Publicise the scheme by co-ordinating or attending local events to help people understand the difference that superfast broadband could make.
- Create effective links with all sections of the community e.g. business, voluntary and community sector, and other local groups.
- Stimulate demand and help build a database of prospective broadband subscribers so that Durham County Council can demonstrate to providers that communities are interested in using superfast broadband.

13 The Digital Durham Broadband Survey has also been released to help identify the needs of residents and businesses for improved broadband services across County Durham. The survey will assist in gauging what the local demand for superfast broadband is; supporting services such as information technology training and the availability of affordable computer equipment; and help clarify where internet services are slow or may be unavailable.

Recommendation

14 That members of the Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee note the progress made in relation to the Digital Durham programme and agree to receive a future update at the July Committee meeting detailing further progress.

Background Paper(s)

Digital Durham Next Generation -Cabinet report – 9 March and 14 December 2011.
Digital Durham News sheet –Issue 2: November, 2011

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Appendix 1: Implications

Finance – The Council currently has capital resources available for the Digital Durham programme within existing capital budgets. Indications from colleagues in Gateshead are that they will honour their match commitments at this stage. The opportunity exists to reduce or supplement the Council's investment should external grant funding be subsequently secured.

Staffing – Delivery of the Digital Durham Programme will require a significant staff commitment in programme management, contract management, communications and demand stimulation. It is expected that this will come from existing resources.

Risk - A full risk log has been developed for the programme. Risk is considered at the Operational board meetings

Equality and Diversity – Broadband will play a significant role in improving the equality of access to service delivery by making more services available in their homes.

Accommodation - None

Crime and Disorder - Broadband will improve access to information and will assist the Police in better coordination of crime prevention initiatives

Human Rights - None

Consultation – A considerable amount of discussions have taken place with interested parties and stakeholders, including potential providers, government agencies, local authorities, broadband interest groups, senior officers, members, etc. in order to develop this report. Consultation will be required with individual users and their representatives as bids for funding are developed.

Procurement - Soft market tests have been undertaken. Procurement processes will follow the appropriate legislation.

Disability Discrimination Act – Access to digital services is playing an increasing role in improving service delivery to people with low mobility.

Legal Implications - The EU has issued Guidelines on the circumstances where State Aid may be permissible for Next Generation Access broadband projects and the proposed approach will be designed to be compatible with those guidelines.