

MEETING:	CABINET
DATE:	18 DECEMBER 2009
TITLE OF REPORT:	BROADBAND IN HEREFORDSHIRE, DEVELOPING A COUNTY APPROACH
PORTFOLIO AREA:	ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND COMMUNITY SERVICES

CLASSIFICATION: Open

Wards Affected

County-wide.

Purpose

To approve the approach to addressing the challenges of Broadband in the county outlined in the attached Intentions Paper.

Key Decision

This is not a Key Decision.

Recommendation

THAT:

- (a) the approach to addressing the challenges of Broadband outlined in the Intentions Paper be agreed; and
- (b) it be noted that the document forms the basis of a paper for wider circulation.

Key Points Summary

- Herefordshire has a number of challenges regarding Broadband coverage and band width which can create disadvantage for individuals in not having equal access to services, and businesses losing advantage as companies maximise technologies.
- The attached Intentions Paper outlines the “intentions” for improving Broadband, including an ambitious vision for the future.
- Advances in technology mean that opportunities for improving Broadband are constantly

Further information on the subject of this report is available from Geoff Hughes,
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changing.

- As well as working with BT Openreach to generally improve Broadband infrastructure, the proposal to emerge is to instigate a community based solution based on pilot areas in a number of geographic locations.
- Improvement to Broadband coverage would support the delivery of Herefordshire's Public services, specifically in aiding access to information. It is also likely e-services will continue to grow which often creates a cost efficient, low carbon solution to access to services.

Alternative Options

- 1 That Herefordshire Council continues to lobby BT Openreach to invest in technology and does not pursue a community based solution that could be costly.

Reasons for Recommendations

- 2 To provide a framework to progress improving Broadband coverage in the county, and use the Intentions Paper to encourage involvement of other stakeholders / partners.

Introduction and Background

- 3 Herefordshire Council undertook a piece of work in early 2008 that identified the extent of broadband "not-spots" and "not-very-good spots" in Herefordshire. A separate survey of broadband issues was conducted in autumn 2008 which backed up the Research findings. A meeting was held in February 2009 with BT Openreach (which looks after BT's infrastructure) to discuss the findings, and as a result BT Openreach are looking at some issues affecting larger communities. Further discussions have taken place with BT Openreach in October.
- 4 The Delivering Digital Inclusion report commissioned by the Government this year found that about 75% of rural internet users say they use the internet for transactions; this is higher than the UK average of 69%. Only 1.5% of homes in villages and hamlets can access cable-based broadband services, compared with almost 60% of urban homes.
- 5 The shortcomings of Broadband coverage have been raised via the CAA (comprehensive area assessment), via Scrutiny Committee, businesses, are a priority of the Rural Access Partnership communities and individual members who are reflecting the concerns of the constituents in areas of no broadband or low bandwidth.

Key Considerations

- 6 The intentions paper attached outlines the need to improve Broadband in the county. At the moment Herefordshire has a number of 'not spots' and 'not very good spots' attributed to the rural profile of the county. Broadband is possible everywhere in the county via satellite, but it would be currently cost prohibitive to provide it in this way.
- 7 A number of rural areas are taking a community development approach where localised solutions are instigated. This has already happened in the county in some areas for example where a local solution is being implemented for Rotherwas, and Ross on Wye has its own wi-fi solution. BT Openreach are aware of the issues in rural areas, but infrastructure costs to every home is not achievable because of cost.
- 8 There are a few local companies who are keen to supply a Broadband solution, including Allpay who have been particularly active.

Community Impact

- 10 If a community approach is followed it is expected that local groups will take a key role in creating a Broadband solution. There are geographic based communities that are already active in trying to achieve better Broadband, though it is likely that some facilitation / support from Herefordshire Council would be needed. This approach has the added benefit of aiding community development that can lead to other neighbourhood initiatives.

Financial Implications

- 11 The intentions paper does not commit any finance but to achieve its ambitions some investment is needed. Economic and Community Services has committed £20,000 from existing budgets to conduct a pilot in one geographic area and the new European funded LEADER Programme can support community facilitation to aid local solutions. AWM are also making funds available for community schemes.

Legal Implications

- 12 None at this stage.

Risk Management

- 13 That any investment and activity has a limited impact which does not create improvement. Mitigation: to take a partnership approach to maximise opportunities and solutions.
- 14 That the vision for Broadband is over ambitious. Mitigation: that it is made clear that vision is aspirational and that achievement of improved Broadband is in phases.
- 15 That the investment needed is unknown and will not be cost effective in terms of level of return. Mitigation: that the cost of solution is tested through the pilot areas before a fuller commitment is made.

Consultees

- 16 Cross public services working group including JMT, PCT, ICT, Children Services and Economic and Community Services.

Appendices

- 17 Intentions Paper – Broadband in Herefordshire, Developing a County Approach.
- 18 Not Spots paper.

Background Papers

- None identified