

Record of officer decision

Decision title:	Faster Farmers Direct Commission
Date of decision:	4 June 2021
Decision maker:	Assistant Director Corporate Support
Authority for delegated decision:	Herefordshire Council's Constitution Part 3: Section 7 – Officer Functions: 3.7.5 Operational decisions. Procedure Rules Part 4: Section 7. Chief Executive Scheme of Delegation SA78 – Updated 29 September 2020.
Ward:	Countywide
Consultation:	None. This is not a new service.
Decision made:	To commission Herefordshire Rural Hub to deliver the Faster Farmers project 2021/22 on behalf of Fastershire for the value of up to £5,000.
Reasons for decision:	<p>The Fastershire Broadband Strategy 2019-22 vision is that all residents and businesses in Herefordshire and Gloucestershire will be enabled to access the connectivity they need and encourage people to use faster broadband to do more online, boost business growth and achieve their potential.</p> <p>The Strategy includes a number of Objectives to increase the infrastructure but also to increase the awareness and demand for superfast broadband and its exploitation once it is available. This is particularly the case with the counties' businesses.</p> <p>The need to encourage the adoption and exploitation of the digital economy is significant both to maximise the economic impact of the council's investment in broadband infrastructure and to increase the degree of financial clawback that the council receives from its broadband contracts.</p> <p>While the Fastershire project itself and council staff are well placed to deliver demand stimulation activity among local business and communities, it recognises where other partners could achieve greater impact by devolving activity. Engaging directly with the land based sector is one such instance.</p> <p>The Herefordshire Rural Hub was established in 2004 to promote economic, social and environmental improvements in farming and rural businesses in Herefordshire. They are recognised locally for the quality, impartiality and honesty of the advice, information and support they provide. The Hub is funded through sponsorship and by subcontracting their services to other rural organisations. It has the most expansive network of rural businesses than any other organisation which offers their sponsors and commissioners the ability to reach parts of the economy that can be difficult to access.</p> <p>Fastershire has a limited budget with which to undertake its demand stimulation activities and achieve what are extremely challenging engagement targets. £5,000 has been notionally allocated to run the Faster Farmers programme which consists of online training and webinars, and training sessions delivered across Herefordshire and Gloucestershire on subjects such as cloud based accounting, farm carbon calculating, and on-line livestock management, to extol the benefits of superfast broadband for the land based sector.</p> <p>Were Fastershire to attempt to run this element of the programme themselves or tender the opportunity among generic training providers it would take a significant amount of time to generate the contacts that the Hub have and could prove impossible to replicate the credibility the hub holds among a difficult to reach group. This could significantly inhibit the council's ability to</p>

	target participants.
Highlight any associated risks/finance/legal/equality considerations:	None. This price of the agreement is within budget and this commission presents no unforeseen risks.
Details of any alternative options considered and rejected:	<p>Alternative Option 1: That the opportunity to deliver the Faster Farmers project is formally tendered. This is not recommended as the Rural Hub is unique in regards to their reach and credibility within the local land based sector. It would be difficult to define or specify these characteristics effectively and to measure the relative merits of alternative bidders.</p> <p>Given the cost benchmarks from other similar activities, it would seem unlikely that the training costs could be significantly more competitive. However, even if marginal savings could be made, it is also likely that other resource would be required to engage the land based sector rendering the exercise counterproductive.</p> <p>Alternative Option 2: Opt not to run the Faster Farmers programme. This is not recommended as we need to deliver Digital Adoption and Exploitation commitments specified in the Fastershire Broadband Strategy.</p>
Details of any declarations of interest made:	n/a

Signed..... Date: 7 June 2021