

SUBJECT:	Superfast Broadband Extension Funding
REPORT OF:	Cllr Ralph Bagge, Leader of the Council
RESPONSIBLE OFFICER	Director of Services
REPORT AUTHOR	Anita Cacchioli
WARD/S AFFECTED	All

1. Purpose of Report

To consider the allocation of £50,000 with equal match funding provided by Broad Band Delivery (BDUK), part of the Department of Media, Culture and Sport, to extend fibre infrastructure further. This will deliver access to superfast broadband to an estimated 100 more premises in the district than can be achieved without a contribution to the Connected Counties programme covering Buckinghamshire and Hertfordshire.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The Council makes available up to £50,000 with equal match from Broadband Delivery UK (BDUK), to fund the extension of fibre infrastructure further in South Bucks.**

2. Reasons for Recommendations

The preferred recommendation is deemed to deliver superfast broadband (fibre) infrastructure in the district at value for money.

3. Content of Report

Through BDUK the Government's aim is to provide superfast broadband (speeds of 24Mbps or more) for at least 95% of UK premises and universal access to basic broadband (speeds of at least 2Mbps i.e. fast enough to watch BBC iPlayer for instance).

Phase 1 aims to provide superfast broadband to 90% of premises in the UK and universal access to basic broadband of 2Mbps, with phase 2 further extending coverage to 95% of the UK.

Buckinghamshire and Hertfordshire County Councils are working together under the name of "Connected Counties" to deliver the framework contract with BT to extend fibre infrastructure across the two counties. The first contract (2014-2016) delivered

access to Super-Fast Broadband (SFBB) to over 65,000 premises, from an investment of £18.06M.

A second contract was agreed for Hertfordshire in 2015, it was then agreed to include Buckinghamshire in August 2016. This was funded by the County Council, three of the four Buckinghamshire districts (South Bucks did not contribute at the time), BTVLEP, BDUK and BT. With the LEP and local authority's contributions attracting £2,035,000 of match funding from BDUK. A further extension was agreed in May 2017 which will bring access of SFBB to over 10,000 premises by December 2019. The opportunity exists for South Bucks to contribute to this programme with its funds being matched by BDUK.

Many businesses and residents increasingly view access to SFBB provision as an essential utility. Consultation undertaken to inform the Council's recently approved Economic Development Strategy, highlighted the importance and need for improved communications infrastructure Broadband and Mobile Wifi. Contributing to the Connected Counties programme provides an opportunity for the Council to be seen to be positively supporting SFBB roll out.

4. Consultation

The areas that will be put forward to be modelled by BT have been subject to a public consultation in September 2016 to assess any market failure in the area. Postcodes are then flagged as eligible for reinvestment.

5. Options

The options below outline how the funding can be used as well as a 'do nothing' option.

Options:

1. Connected Counties – contribute £50K funding to be matched by BDUK subject to their approval, (We have been informally advised this will be forthcoming subject to an early decision on South Bucks part) via a contract change in Contract 2 to extend fibre further in the value of £100,000 plus BT contribution. It can take under six months to model and agree the actual impact of the funding.
2. Non-Connected Counties – use the funding to invest in the delivery of fibre infrastructure via a separate procurement and/or a community led partnership. A new procurement can take at least six months to develop. There is no match funding available in such a scenario. The Council would also need to identify and potentially fund the resource to take such an approach forward.
3. Do nothing – this will mean that South Bucks would only be impacted by the current plans. This will still leave considerable areas not accessing superfast broadband.

4. Option 1 is recommended as it facilitates the ability to extend fibre further in South Bucks on a value for money basis.

7. Corporate Implications

7.1 Financial:

7.2 On the assumption that the full BDUK match funding is secured, South Bucks DC would need to release £50,000 from the Council's reserves which had been set aside for economic development related projects in 2016/17.

7.3 Legal: Within the Local Government Act 2000 all local councils were given legal powers to allow them to safeguard the "economic, social and environmental well-being" of their local areas. This was superseded by the general power of competence; a power available to local authorities in England to do "anything that individuals generally may do". It was provided for in the Localism Act 2011

7.4 The Connected Counties contract allows the inclusion of additional funding.

7.5 Equalities:

7.6 Improved connectivity is revolutionising our quality of life, from how we work and how our children learn, to how we spend our leisure time, how we do our weekly shop, and how we engage with public services. The additional investment in SFBB would reduce the number of residents and businesses unable to access services through this medium. However, a small percentage of unconnected properties will remain

7.7 Sustainability:

7.8 Provision of SFBB would help support local businesses, especially small businesses many of which are home based.

8. Links to Council Policy Objectives

The proposal supports the objective to promote local communities. It also supports the Council's business plans, and the Economic Development Strategy specific priority to support the local economy through broadband roll out.

9. Next Step

Subject to the approval of the use of £50,000 and subsequent allocation of BDUK match funding, Connected Counties would then issue a contract change request to BT requesting the modelling to extend fibre further in South Bucks at a value for £100,000 on a value for money basis. The response of the modelling can take 10-12 weeks to build, and this will identify the areas impacted, the technology to be used and the timeline for deployment.