

Superfast Broadband Extension Programme

Cabinet

Date: 7th February 2018

Author: Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning and Sustainability
Corporate Director, Resources and Growth

Wards: All

Parishes Affected: All

1. Purpose and Reasons

- 1.1 This report seeks to inform Cabinet about the work being undertaken to provide superfast broadband to rural parts of the Borough and to update Cabinet on securing ultrafast broadband to support the local economy.
- 1.2 The report is a response to Council's resolution of 13th July 2017 as well as an opportunity to report progress towards achieving part of the Council's Vision, Priorities, and pledges.
- 1.3 This report relates specifically to Pledge 1 of the Council's Vision: 'Deliver the Government standard Superfast Broadband coverage to all commercial and domestic premises in the Borough by 2017'. It also contributes to the corporate policy goal to secure 'right skills, right jobs in the right places'.

2. Recommendations

Cabinet is recommended to:

- 2.1 Note the report and the progress being made towards achieving the Vision Pledge.
- 2.2 Authorise the Corporate Director, Resources and Growth, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning and Sustainability:
 - 2.2.1 To facilitate the deployment of the 20th base station to complete the coverage of the 4GLTE network
 - 2.2.2 To issue a letter of variation to BDUK that will encompass the contract change concerning the reduction in the number of base stations to be used in North Swindon and the associated reduction in the value of the contract
- 2.3 Authorise the Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning and Sustainability to inform Council about the response to its resolution as soon as is practicable.

Superfast Broadband Extension Programme

Cabinet

Date: 7th February 2018

3. Detail

Background

- 3.1 In May 2015, following an open tender process the Superfast Broadband Extension Programme Contract was awarded to UKB Networks (UKBN) for a value of £1.9m, funded equally by the Council and BDUK. The outcome required from the Contract is to provide superfast broadband (above 25mbps) to over 19,500 homes that could not access superfast speeds.
- 3.2 In September 2015, the Council adopted a Vision including the specific pledge to secure access to the government standard superfast broadband across the Borough (Council Minute 33, 2015/16 refers).
- 3.3 At the Council meeting of 13th July 2017, Members resolved (Council Minute 21, 2017/18 refers):

“This Council:

Notes that:

- a) A modern, vibrant economy needs access to fast broadband, and
- b) Before the Council signed the contract with UK Broadband Networks Ltd there was no direct interest in expanding fibre networks across Swindon from the private sector.

Welcomes:

- a) That hundreds of residents now have access to faster broadband;
- b) That decisive action from the Conservative Council has stimulated the market;
- c) The investment made by Virgin and BT in rolling out fibre broadband thanks to the support of local residents, Conservative Councillors and Conservative MPs over many years; and
- d) The exciting news that Swindon is a test bed for both G-Fast and 5G broadband.

Council asks the Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning and Sustainability to bring a report to Cabinet:

- (a) Setting out the costs and benefits so far, particularly in rural areas, and the additional activity by the private sector to provide broadband since the Council's decision; and

Superfast Broadband Extension Programme

Cabinet

Date: 7th February 2018

(b) Detailing how Swindon can make progress in securing the ultrafast broadband so that local companies remain as competitive as those in rival locations.”

Update on the UKBN Project

- 3.4 The project governance is dictated by the BDUK Grant conditions and includes the establishment of joint Operations and Strategic Boards, with representation from BDUK, UKBN and the Council.
- 3.5 A project website www.superfastswindon.com has been created. The website provides details of the project, technical solution, areas that will be covered by the UKBN network (if residents are not in scope which alternative suppliers can provide coverage), and the opportunity to register for updates to the project. Residents can also register to become a broadband champion and support the promotion of the project within their community.
- 3.6 The project payment schedule is based on delivery of specific milestones. The final milestone requires a take up of 9% of the target homes to be achieved. UKBN and the Council have a marketing plan in progress that includes the production of newsletters, social media content, broadcast media and ‘pop up’ events at appropriate locations with high footfall or where local events are taking place.
- 3.7 In making the decision to appoint UKBN, Cabinet was mindful of the preference for a fibre solution that large numbers of residents of North Swindon would be likely to express. Whilst this was recognised, on balance it was felt the additional coverage and low cost of the UKBN proposal offered better value for Swindon as a whole. Since then reaction has been mixed, with rural communities generally welcoming the opportunity to benefit from superfast technology and vocal objections remaining to the UKBN solution in some other areas.
- 3.8 Progress with the project has been slower than anticipated; this has been due to the challenges of finding appropriate locations for masts. UKBN have now identified the necessary target sites for all masts.
- 3.9 The locations of the North Swindon sites were refined following guidance from the Councils Planning Department and submitted for planning consent January 2016. The design solution for the deployment of base stations in North Swindon has been reduced to a single site to provide the required coverage from Cassini Drive Swindon. Despite removing the other 5 sites the design maintains the 99.4% coverage target. The other sites will be retained as potential capacity upgrade sites that can be deployed as customer take-up requires.
- 3.10 This change in design is subject to a contract change request that is currently under consideration by UKBN legal team. The proposed change will create a financial saving to the project to be shared between BDUK and SBC. The value

Superfast Broadband Extension Programme

Cabinet

Date: 7th February 2018

of the saving will depend upon the take up across the area as the capacity sites might still be required to reach the Milestone 3 take up target. However, the saving is likely to reduce the Council's contribution from £950K to £865K over the project.

- 3.11 This last mast is due to be in place by the end of first quarter 2018, marking the completion of the project's initial deployment phase.
- 3.12 The current provision via 19 of the proposed 20 LTE base stations has already allowed UKBN to make available Superfast broadband products to 91,670 customer premises, which includes 13,894 of the whitelist premises (those sites that have no alternative superfast provision). The erection of the 20th base station will bring this up to the target of 19,936 whitelist premises (99% of the list).
- 3.13 A recent intensification of the marketing by Relish (UKBN's direct sales company) has led to an increase in the take up of the provision. The campaign included Sponsorship of Swindon Town FC, posters at the railway station and on bus stops, local radio and online social media. At the end of December the number of premises that have signed up passed 1,000. The campaign was paused over the Christmas period, a time when broadband signups are expected to slow, but will restart at the beginning of February.

4. Alternative Options

- 4.1 Not agreeing to sign off the lease for the final base station would further delay the deployment and possibly necessitate the return to the earlier deployment plan of 26 base stations.
- 4.2 Not issuing the letter of variation would prevent the completion of the contract change and would force the contractor to revert to the earlier deployment plan of 26 base stations.
- 4.3 Reverting to the 26 base station design would also mean reverting to the earlier cost model and the council contribution of £950K.

5. Implications, Diversity Impact Assessment and Risk Management

Financial and Procurement Implications

- 5.1 There are no financial implications from this report as no decisions are recommended.

Legal and Human Rights Implications

- 5.2 All legal and human rights considerations were taken into account when preparing this report

Superfast Broadband Extension Programme

Cabinet

Date: 7th February 2018

All Other Implications (including Staff, Sustainability, Health, Rural, Crime and Disorder)

- 5.3 There are none

Diversity Impact Assessment

- 5.4 A Diversity Impact Assessment (DIA) has been completed for this project and a copy is available from the report author. In essence the DIA states that the current Superfast Broadband coverage does not discriminate against any particular equality groups, being purely to geographic factors. However arguably the financial economic status of households can be affected by their ability to access superfast broadband. For this reason, investment in superfast broadband is felt to advance equality of opportunity for residents.

Risk Management

- 5.5 The Strategic Board involving BDUK, UKBN and the Council and involving the Corporate Director Resources and Growth, maintain a full risk register.

6. Consultees

- 6.1 The Director of Finance, (Section 151 Officer) and Director of Law and Democratic Services (Monitoring Officer) are consulted in respect of all reports.

7. Background Papers

- 7.1 Not applicable

8. Appendices

- 8.1 Not applicable