

## **Report to the Cabinet**

**Report reference:** C-014-2014/15  
**Date of meeting:** 8 September 2014



**Epping Forest  
District Council**

**Portfolio:** Technology & Support Services  
Asset Management & Economic Development

**Subject:** Funding for Superfast Broadband Programme

**Responsible Officer:** Mike Warr (01992 564593).

**Democratic Services:** Gary Woodhall (01992 564470).

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### **Recommendations/Decisions Required:**

- (1) That Cabinet recommend to Council to make a bid for a maximum of £84,000 to co-fund the investment in superfast broadband infrastructure in order to achieve 95% coverage in the district and that a bid for this sum be included in the draft capital programme for 2015/16;
- (2) That Cabinet agree to write to the Chief Executive of Essex County Council informing her that this council is minded to support the Superfast Essex programme and that cabinet has provisionally agreed to make a bid up to a maximum of £84,000, subject to the approval of the budget in February 2015;
- (3) That a Portfolio Holder Advisory Group be established, with the support of officers as required, to work through the potential district priorities for this investment, in order to recommend our preferred options, in so far as they are practical and in discussion with Essex County Council and suppliers;
- (4) That the composition of the Portfolio Holder Advisory Group be seven Members with Group Leaders requested to make suitable nominations and chaired by the Technology & Support Services Portfolio Holder;
- (5) That, to inform the discussions of the Portfolio Holder Advisory Group, an exercise be undertaken to determine both current levels of coverage and current levels and types of demand for enhanced broadband provision and access throughout the District;
- (6) That to further inform the discussions of the Portfolio Holder Advisory Group, further advice be sought from Essex County Council as to the likely timescales for completion of the rollout of superfast broadband and the implications for the remaining 5% of the District which will remain without superfast broadband once 95% has been achieved;
- (7) That the Portfolio Holder Advisory Group presents its preferred options to Cabinet for debate and adoption, with the adopted priorities to be notified to Essex County Council as the Council's priorities for the investment of the agreed £84,000 funding; and
- (8) That the process for prioritising the investment of non-district matched funds to achieve 93% coverage across Essex be clarified with Essex County Council and opportunities to be involved in that process be identified in order that our agreed

**priorities also be considered as part of that investment programme.**

### **Executive Summary:**

The current Superfast Essex broadband programme, representing an investment of £24.6million in broadband infrastructure in areas where commercial suppliers are not planning to invest in the next three years, if at all, will make superfast broadband available to 87.4% of home and business premises in Essex by summer 2016. In April 2014, Government announced a further £10.62m would be made available to Essex through the Broadband Delivery UK programme provided it was matched locally. The funds matched by Essex County Council will enable coverage of 93%. Essex CC has appealed to districts to consider contributing additional match funding in order to enable coverage of 95% to be achieved.

Epping Forest District Council is asked to provide funding in the sum of £84,000 to enable 95% coverage in the district. Without the investment by the Council 93% coverage would still be achieved, the extra monies enabling an extra 2% of hard to reach areas to be covered.

Subject to the recommendation that a bid be made for this investment, Epping Forest District Council will also need to assess levels of demand across the district and work towards the identification and adoption of the Council's priorities for how this funding is invested. These priorities to inform discussions with Essex County Council as to how and where investment takes place

### **Reasons for Proposed Decision:**

Broadband access is a necessity and key enabler, both for our local businesses looking to expand and compete in a global market and residents who want to keep up with the digital world. This extension to the programme will allow the Essex Superfast Broadband Programme to improve connections for even more homes and businesses and the additional funding requested in this report will enable that extended level of coverage to be achieved specifically across the Epping Forest district.

### **Other Options for Action:**

Cabinet could opt to not make a funding contribution to the Superfast Broadband Programme. This decision could result in the district failing to reach 95% superfast broadband coverage affecting residents and businesses opportunities to benefit from such an infrastructure. It may also limit any discretion the District Council may have over where and how the infrastructure is improved within its boundaries.

### **Report:**

1. Under the national government-led initiative to make the UK one of the best connected countries in the world, Essex County Council has created the Superfast Essex Programme, which is currently implementing the Broadband Delivery UK or BDUK project. The contract that ECC has with BT will see 87.4% of Essex's premises get access to superfast broadband (average download speeds in excess of 24 Megabits per second Mb/s) by summer 2016.
2. Recently Essex County Council's Cabinet approved an extension to the programme, supporting a £20.5m investment in superfast broadband infrastructure in Essex. Essex County Council will commit £5.5m towards the Superfast Broadband Extension Scheme, which will be match-funded by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. A further contribution of around £9.5m is expected to be procured from suppliers, who will be contracted to work with Essex County Council (ECC) on the programme.
3. This extension will allow ECC to improve connections for even more homes and

businesses. The intention is to use the new County Council investment across two main projects – a fibre extension project with the intention of reaching an additional 40,000 homes or business; and a rural challenge project with the aspiration to provide superfast broadband to a further 20,000 rural homes or businesses.

4. The County Council is unable to fully match fund the full grant allocation made available by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and discussions are continuing to seek contributions from Districts and other funding sources. So far Braintree District Council, Tendring District Council and Epping Forest District Council have indicated that they would contribute.

5. In the Epping Forest District area it is currently estimated that by summer 2016 87.82% of premises will have superfast broadband available to them – fractionally higher than the county average.

6. The current scheme is progressing well with more premises being connected than anticipated in the timescales set down. It is worth noting however that while the speed of deployment is quicker than anticipated, the cost is in line with projections, which does not therefore suggest any surplus.

7. Epping Forest District Council has long campaigned for better broadband connectivity in the district and officers and members have played significant roles in the Superfast Essex programme. The council has also taken a lead in investing in innovative solutions, using point to point radio link networks to extend coverage and provide business network resilience.

8. This report seeks Cabinet recommendation to Council to make a bid up to a maximum of £84,000 to be included in the draft capital programme for 2015/16 to enable delivery of superfast broadband in the Epping Forest area.

9. The current Superfast Essex programme, managed and led by Essex County Council, represents an investment of £24.6million in broadband infrastructure in areas where commercial suppliers are not planning to invest in the next three years, if at all.

10. In April 2014, Government announced a further £10.62m would be made available to Essex through the BDUK programme provided it was matched locally. Also in April 2014, a letter was received from Joanna Killian, Chief Executive, Essex County Council setting out the government investment plans, the planned level of investment by Essex County Council, and seeking district council expressions of interest to contribute funding to the programme.

11. In June 2014, the Director of Resources sent an expression of interest on behalf of the council indicating that £84,000 of funding could be made available in the 2015/16 financial year.

12. The figure of £84,000 is estimated to be the appropriate amount of funding required from Epping Forest DC.

13. On 22 July 2014, Essex County Council's Cabinet allocated £5.5million to match the Government money and appealed to districts to contribute funding as well.

14. A subsequent email from Councillor Kevin Bentley, Essex County Council Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Economic Growth and Infrastructure was also received reiterating the appeal for district council contributions to the fund and the text of this email is attached as Appendix 2.

15. Were Cabinet to recommend to Council to make a bid for a maximum of £84,000 and Council agreed to make this bid ECC will be in a position to inform BDUK that further funding is available which in turn will be matched by BDUK. Furthermore, a prerequisite of the contract that will be tendered by ECC will be that the winning contractor will be obliged to

match fund the public sector contribution so further increasing the amounts invested.

16. By committing funding, the District Council would be able to have much more of a say on where the investment is needed to address the Council's priorities. Provided the money is being spent in eligible areas, the District will maintain some discretion on where the infrastructure is improved.

17. This issue of priorities therefore needs to be addressed in order that, as a District we are clear on what we see as the best value for money allocation of these limited resources in order to achieve our District's objectives. It is suggested that a Portfolio Holder Advisory Group of members, with the support of offers as required, be established to work through the many potential priorities, whether they be increased bandwidth for business premises, increased levels of enhanced coverage and access for rural communities or other priorities, in order to recommend our preferred options.

18. With regard to the composition of the Portfolio Holder Advisory Group, this is to consist of seven members, with Group Leaders invited to nominate suitable persons to the Group. The Chairman of the Group would be the Technology & Support Services Portfolio Holder.

19. A key element of determining our priorities will be a greater understanding of the current levels and types of demand for superfast broadband throughout our District. It is therefore also recommended that work to understand this demand should be undertaken by the council.

20. To further inform the discussions of the Portfolio Holder Advisory Group, further advice be sought from Essex County Council as to the likely timescales for completion of the rollout of superfast broadband and the implications for the remaining 5% of the District which will remain without superfast broadband once 95% has been achieved.

21. Furthermore, the Council's priorities, once established, should also be used to inform how Essex County Council will be investing the funding available to bring coverage up to 93% across Essex. Whilst the District Council is not contributing to that funding element, it is important that we understand the governance arrangements that will determine how 93% coverage is achieved and as such we should, as a Council, seek to understand and be involved in those discussions.

**Resource Implications:**

A bid for up to £84,000 would be made for the draft capital programme in 2015/16

**Legal and Governance Implications:**

None

**Safer, Cleaner and Greener Implications:**

None

**Consultation Undertaken:**

None

**Background Papers:**

Letter from Joanna Killian, Chief Executive Essex County Council and email from Kevin Bentley, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Economic Growth and Infrastructure, Essex County Council attached as Appendices to report.

**Risk Management:**

There is a risk that if businesses within the District do not have access to Superfast Broadband services then they will locate outside of the District and the Council will have failed to achieve the potential for economic Development within the District.

# Due Regard Record

This page shows **which groups of people are affected** by the subject of this report. It sets out **how they are affected** and how any **unlawful discrimination** they experience can be eliminated. It also includes information about how **access to the service(s)** subject to this report can be improved for the different groups of people; and how they can be assisted to **understand each other better** as a result of the subject of this report.

S149 Equality Act 2010 requires that due regard must be paid to this information when considering the subject of this report.

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The Superfast Essex broadband programme will be rolled out across the district and the funds requested in this report would apply to all groups of residents and businesses located in the affected areas in the sense that it addresses the broadband infrastructure rather than how it is used .

In terms of addressing specific inequalities the funds aim to address the ability of our residents and businesses to access improved speeds of broadband access and would be used to some extent to improve the level of service experienced by users in rural settings as opposed to urban areas.

An improved broadband service will enhance residents ability to access services and information better enabling them to live active and engaged digital lives. Improved access to social media, interactive services and support networks might enable those residents currently socially excluded by lack of transport, mobility or remoteness to become more integrated into a wider community.

With the development of increasingly accessible online services, those residents and businesses who might feel excluded through a disability or condition which prevents them from otherwise accessing the services they need, will also hopefully benefit from the enhanced infrastructure.