

WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL
FINANCE AND MANAGEMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
WEDNESDAY 8 APRIL 2015

RURAL SUPERFAST BROADBAND PROJECT
REPORT OF THE JOINT HEAD OF BUSINESS INFORMATION AND CHANGE

(Contact: Phil Martin: - Tel (01993) 861201)

(The report is for information)

1. PURPOSE

As part of its Work Programme the Committee expressed a desire to monitor the progress of the planning and implementation of the Rural Broadband project. This report seeks to update the Committee on the progress of the project to date.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That committee notes progress to date on the rural broadband project.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1. In May 2014, Cabinet considered the different options open to the Council in regards achieving its aim of providing superfast broadband coverage to all of the premises in West Oxfordshire. This would be done by building upon the BDUK sponsored project led by the County Council whose target is 90% coverage across Oxfordshire.
- 3.2. The option that Cabinet preferred when looking at how best to meet their aim was to use an alternative service provider, (Cotswold Broadband - CBB) via a co-investment model rather than extending the contracted with BT. One of the key benefits of this option was that BDUK funding of up to £1.6m, along with private sector investment had been secure, and both of these would be drawn down before the Council's loan, which would earn interest and is secured on the assets of the Company.
- 3.3. Since Cabinet considered the Heads of Terms of the loan capital in September, Officers have been working closely with CBB and BDUK to ensure all the relevant checkpoints are achieved in terms of both State Aid and releasing the agreed grant.
- 3.4. In November CBB undertook an OJEU Compliant Procurement exercise to appoint a contractor to design deliver and operate an NGA infrastructure for the approved intervention area across the District. In order to meet the specific guidelines laid down the tender had to be 'technology neutral', therefore providing suppliers with a completely 'free hand' in regards to the solution they wished to propose.
- 3.5. The deadline for submissions was the 16th January 2015 and the evaluation process was completed in early February, which involved a non-scored clarification meeting that provided the evaluation team with an opportunity to meet the different companies and assess their submissions before a final decision was made. Following the statutory 10 day 'stand still' period ITS were appointed and work began finalising the contract details.
- 3.6. In addition to the tendering exercise, CBB has been working closely with a private sector investment company, who currently are just in the process of completing their due diligence checks.

3.7. Due to the nature of the project, BDUK have been advising CBB on what checkpoints it needs to satisfy in order to meet the funding conditions. To date CBB have met the relevant checks and will be submitting the required documents and evidence to the final checkpoint on 9 April.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The Council is in the process of finalising the terms and conditions of the £1.6m loan that Cabinet approved in September 2014 ready for inclusion in the final checkpoint submission in April.

5. RISKS

The key risk of the project at this stage is that CBB do not pass the final checkpoint and therefore are then not eligible for the BDUK funding. This risk is being mitigated by both the Council and CBB working closely with BDUK to ensure all the relevant documentation is completed as required.

6. REASONS

Work in partnership to sustain vibrant, healthy and economically prosperous towns and villages with full employment

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Background Papers:
None