

83. CONNECTING DEVON AND SOMERSET BROADBAND (CDS)

The Economy Manager referred Members to the report circulated with the agenda for the Committee to evaluate the Council's commitment to contributing £250,000 towards the Connecting Devon and Somerset (CDS) superfast broadband rollout programme Phase 2, following the announcement by CDS that they had terminated the contract of the chosen provider Gigaclear. The £250,000 commitment made by the Council in 2016 was budgeted for the 2019/20 financial year. Should the Council continue with the contribution, the commitment would be for the 2022/23 financial year at the earliest. The contribution would be match funded by Building Digital UK (BDUK), part of the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and tasked with the delivery of superfast broadband and local full fibre networks across the UK. As such, the loss of TDC's commitment would mean that there would be £500,000 less invested in the rollout programme for Devon and Somerset as a whole.

The Committee welcomed Matt Barrow and Phil Roberts from the CDS project, who updated Members on the CDS programme.

The superfast broadband programme was introduced in 2011 in response to concerns that the commercial deployment of superfast broadband (defined as download speeds of at least 24 megabits per second) would fail to reach many parts of the UK. The Phase 1 programme in Devon and Somerset sought to extend superfast coverage to 90 percent of UK premises by 2016, from a starting point of 66%. By the end of the phase, coverage in Teignbridge was up to 80% from a starting point of 50%. While this figure was below the national target, Teignbridge was in the top quartile with respect to the CDS programme delivery.

There was a commitment from CDS that the £500,000, would provide services within Teignbridge but because of the nature of the build programme the facilities might require to be located outside of the geographic boundaries of Teignbridge.

Background Paper 1 to the report set out alternative and additional approaches to the CDS Programme, such as community led solutions.

Concern was expressed that there was no assurance that the Council's contribution would be used entirely for improving broadband speeds and coverage for Teignbridge residents, when Teignbridge was the only Devon Authority that had previously agreed to financially commit to the CDS project.

It was proposed by Councillor Purser and seconded by Councillor Gribble that the Council continues with its commitment to contribute £250,000 to the Connecting Devon and Somerset broadband rollout programme, as set out in the report circulated with the agenda. This proposal was lost.

It was noted that the Executive at its meeting on 31 October would be advised accordingly.

Appendix