

Digital Innovation and Efficiency Committee

Item No.

Report title:	Local Full Fibre Network Bid
Date of meeting:	12 October 2017
Responsible Chief Officer:	Simon George - Executive Director, Finance & Commercial Services
Strategic impact Building upon the successful Better Broadband for Norfolk Programme, there is an opportunity to bid for new funding from the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS) to enable further deployment of Fibre Optic Cabling across the county in support of high speed data connectivity for residents and businesses.	

Executive summary

Government has announced that it will invest £200m in locally-led projects across the UK to help provide the fastest and most reliable broadband possible.

Starting in late 2017 the Local Full Fibre Networks (LFFN) programme will invite bids into a Challenge Fund from local bodies who can leverage local investment and activity to stimulate more fibre connections in their local areas.

The programme will include: harnessing long-term public sector internet demand, providing gigabit connection vouchers to increase business take-up, upgrading connections into public buildings with fibre and improving access to publicly-owned infrastructure. These activities will thereby improve the business case for the private sector to invest in fibre networks to connect even more homes and businesses.

Norfolk County Council has submitted an expression of interest (EoI) to bid against the programme on behalf of itself, the Norfolk Districts, Universities, the Local Enterprise Partnership, the Chamber of Commerce and other relevant bodies.

Recommendations:

- 1. To consider the opportunity and approve the development of a full bid in conjunction with Norfolk District Councils and any other relevant bodies.**
- 2. To delegate authority for the submission of the bid to the Head of Information Management & Technology in consultation with the Chair and Deputy Chair of the Digital Innovation and Efficiency Committee.**

1. The Background and Context

- 1.1. To help provide the fastest and most reliable broadband available, Government will invest £200m in locally-led projects across the UK. Starting in late 2017 the Local Full Fibre Networks (LFFN) programme will invite bids into a Challenge Fund from local bodies who can leverage local investment and activity to stimulate more fibre connections in their local areas.

The LFFN programme will have capital funding available from FY18/19 to FY20/21 (with some funding planned for use in FY17/18). Bids must be planned such that all LFFN funding is disbursed no later than March 2021. No revenue funding, or contribution to admin costs will be eligible.

It is not expected to be a condition for support that bidders must provide match funding, however DCMS are more likely to support proposals which either have co-investment from bidders (either capital funding, or committed service charges over several years), or those projects that are most likely to encourage additional investment from other parties.

2. Scope of the proposed bid

- 2.1. Norfolk County, on behalf of the wider public sector, academia and business development groups has submitted an expression of interest in preparation for a full bid against the LFFN Programme.
- 2.2. The DCMS LFFN programme will include four main themes: harnessing long-term public sector internet demand, providing gigabit connection vouchers to increase business take-up, upgrading connections into public buildings with fibre and improving access to publicly-owned infrastructure.

Although the Gigabit Voucher Scheme and Full Fibre Upgrades for Public Sector Sites streams are expected to form the body of Norfolk's Challenge Fund bid. The expression of interest submitted demonstrates that Norfolk will create an integrated programme involving all four themes.

Public Sector Anchor Tenancy

Norfolk's public sector organisations are currently identifying operational buildings where service delivery would be enhanced by full fibre connections, e.g. academy schools where Norfolk County Council host wireless (microwave) telecommunication hardware and there is benefit in switching to full fibre links.

Gigabit Voucher Scheme

Both interest in, and take-up of the Government's Broadband Subsidy Scheme in Norfolk has been amongst the highest in the UK. This demonstrates Norfolk can generate interest and then ensure this translates into take-up of a voucher scheme of the type proposed.

Norfolk organisations have worked together to consider the likely requirements for a Full Fibre Voucher Scheme and how best to promote it. The following is seen as key:

- A Voucher Scheme which is customer driven, bottom up not top down from suppliers.
- Gigabit capable solutions, with customers able to purchase only the bandwidth needed, but able to easily increase capacity when their need grows. Allowing up-scaling over time.
- Grants reflecting actual cost to deploy, not a standard sum which could result in either grants exceeding the actual costs to deploy, or disadvantaging more rural businesses where implementation costs are higher and therefore excess civils costs may be payable.
- Options such as self-dig should be available to reduce the overall solution implementation cost, where the customer has the capacity to do this. Norfolk has practical examples where this has worked well, making solutions affordable when they would not otherwise have been.

Full Fibre Upgrades for Public Sector Sites

The public sector in Norfolk is beginning to explore the concept of Digital Hub sites where residents and businesses can access a full range of integrated digital based services from multiple organisations. Digital Hub sites would be located around Norfolk, offering digital ways to access services, for instance video calls to access specialist health consultations.

It is envisaged these sites will offer Full Fibre Business Incubators Units, providing not just access to high speed broadband but a wide range of specialist support and advice services, to support start-ups.

This approach is understood not to require state aid approval, as it would be similar to procuring a public sector network, albeit asset ownership requirements will need to be considered to ensure there are no state aid implications.

Reuse of Public Sector Infrastructure Assets

Norfolk County Council is conducting an audit of public sector owned assets that could be exploited. These include: office buildings, fire towers, wind turbines & retained schools. Property assets would be documented on an asset inventory which would be made available to support relevant activities associated with the other themes.

3. Financial Implications

- 3.1. The expression of interest was for £13m. The amount of existing or new funding which can be leveraged from the public and private sectors to provide match funding will be established during the development of the bid.

4. Issues, risks and innovation

- 4.1. The major risk for this activity is the time and effort required to develop the bid which may or may not be successful in obtaining some or all of the funding sought.

Officer Contact

If you have any questions about matters contained in this paper or want to see copies of any assessments, eg equality impact assessment, please get in touch with:

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