



**REPORT of
INTERIM DIRECTOR OF PLANNING AND REGULATORY SERVICES**

to

**FINANCE AND CORPORATE SERVICES COMMITTEE
22 SEPTEMBER 2015**

PROVISION OF SUPERFAST ESSEX BROADBAND

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 At the last Finance and Corporate Services Committee meeting, the Committee considered a report from the Director of Planning and Regulatory Services to seek endorsement for Council to approve a capital transfer of up to £90,994 to Essex County Council, as match funding to support the Phase 2a rollout of the superfast broadband infrastructure programme. This will enable a higher percentage of properties to secure fibre cable with broadband speeds of at least 24 megabits per second across the Maldon District.
- 1.2 However the Committee expressed some concerns over the value for money for this project and asked for this matter to be deferred pending a further approach to Essex County Council for more information on the number of houses involved, and how to measure the success of the proposed work. Both **APPENDICES 1** and **2** show the additional information received from Essex County Council. The Committee has also asked for an officer presentation from the County Council at this Committee.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- (i) that the contents of this report be noted;

To the Council:

- (ii) that a capital sum of up to £90,994 be transferred to Essex County Council in respect of match funding for Phase 2a of the Essex Superfast Broadband Project.

3. SUMMARY OF KEY ISSUES

- 3.1 One of the priorities of the Council's adopted Economic Prosperity Strategy is to improve connectivity within the District by ensuring the widest possible coverage of Superfast Broadband to the benefit of supporting rural businesses, home working and creating new business opportunities.

- 3.2** The public funded roll-out (known as Superfast Essex Phase 1) is presently scheduled to extend fibre based services to just over 87% of premises across the County by June 2016. The current position is that the early phases of the deployment of the fibre cabinets are from June to December this year and the precise locations of these can be found on the mapping section of the website www.superfastessex.org/maps.
- 3.3** Recognising that more work remains to be done across the UK, and in Essex, the Department for Culture Media and Sport (DCMS) proposed a further fibre-broadband rollout (Phase 2) and made a grant allocation of up to £10.72m for the county of Essex, with the requirement that it be fully match funded. In April 2014 Essex County Council (ECC) sent out a letter to all Essex authorities pledging £5.5m of capital funding for this project and sought expressions of interest from local authorities in the County to increase the match funded budget to enable a greater take up of the DCMS grant allocation.
- 3.4** At the meeting of the Planning and Licensing Committee on 12 June 2014 Members agreed in principle that the extension of Superfast Broadband across the District was important to support rural business and encourage new entrepreneurial activity (Minute No. 151 refers).
- 3.5** The Finance and Corporate Services Committee on 29 July 2014 resolved that the principle of an Expression of Interest to Essex County Council for contributing match funding up to £90,994 be made to secure wider coverage of Superfast Broadband across the District (Minute No. 301 refers).
- 3.6** Following recommendation from the Finance and Corporate Services Committee the Council on 18 December 2014 agreed that match funding in relation to the roll out of Superfast Broadband across the District be included in the capital programme (Minute No. 687 refers).
- 3.7** In 2013 only 38% of premises in Maldon District were able to access superfast broadband. The Phase 1 rollout will extend this to 77% - which represents an increase by 39% - by summer 2016. Under the Phase 2 programme now being planned, Maldon District is set to receive a further 15% increase in connectivity to ensure that 92% of the 28,432 premises in the District can access fast broadband. However, this is dependent on local support from Maldon District Council.
- 3.8** As part of the Phase 2 rollout, the current plan for Phase 2 includes a significant further investment by ECC to enable 3,314 properties in Maldon District to access superfast broadband. With a firm decision by Maldon District Council, to be taken by this committee, to invest £90,994 in the Superfast Essex programme Phase 2 rollout, an additional 931 properties will be included in the programme, bringing the overall deployment plan for Maldon to 4,245 premises.
- 3.9** It is worth noting that as part of the Superfast Essex programme, Maldon's local contribution will attract the DCMS grant, immediately doubling the investment amount, as well as a supplier contribution under the contract with BT. This supplier contribution is now confirmed as being 47% of the total investment amount for the Phase 2 project.

- 3.10** Deployment for Phase 2 across Essex is currently planned to take place between 2017 and 2019, with the detailed deployment plan yet to be determined.

3.11 Further Information

- 3.11.1** The Phase 2 areas to be covered are indicated in pink on the attached map supplied by Superfast Essex July 2015 (**APPENDIX 3**). The proposed rollout map for Phase 2 has also been published on the Superfast Essex programme website www.superfastessex.org/maps. This interactive map shows the proposed coverage at street level, and currently includes the additional coverage in Maldon district to be funded by the local contribution.
- 3.11.2** It should be noted that the Phase 2 deployment areas are ‘subject to change’. As full site surveys are carried out during the rollout the actual deployment area may change slightly. However, the commitment remains to connect the number of premises stated.
- 3.11.3** After the implementation of Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the Superfast Broadband programme takes place, Maldon will have received a coverage uplift from 38% to 92%. However, it is recognised that some areas in Maldon District will still not be reached. Discussions are ongoing to secure further funding to expand the rollout further to reach those final remaining rural areas.
- 3.11.4** The discussions to secure further funding for Maldon district include a plan by Superfast Essex, in collaboration with the Bradwell Legacy Partnership, to bid for funding from the Nuclear Decommissioning Agency’s Social Fund. One of the objectives of the Legacy Partnership’s action plan is to improve broadband connectivity in the area, and the proposed £90,994 contribution by Maldon District Council towards the Superfast Essex Phase 2 project is registered as an action towards achieving that objective. Confirming this funding will indicate the Council’s strong commitment to pursuing better connectivity in the district.

4. CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1** Economic development has the aim of improving the long term economy of the Maldon district, by attracting new businesses, increasing skills, encouraging investment opportunities, attracting visitors and identifying opportunities for sustainable growth and development. The vitality, diversity and responsiveness of the economy is fundamental to the future prosperity of the district and its position within the wider economy.
- 4.2** The Council’s adopted Economic Prosperity Strategy sets out the long term growth vision for generating 2,000 jobs in the District by 2029 by encouraging employment generating developments and investment into the District.
- 4.3** A priority within the Economic Prosperity Strategy is to improve connectivity within the District by ensuring the widest possible coverage of Superfast Broadband which is particularly important for supporting rural businesses and creating new business opportunities.

5. IMPACT ON CORPORATE GOALS

- 5.1 The maximisation of the extent of Superfast Broadband coverage across the District is important to the delivery of the Council Council's Economic Prosperity Strategy and supports the Corporate Goal of Protecting and Shaping the District.

6. IMPLICATIONS

- (i) **Impact on Customers** – Positive as coverage of Superfast Broadband across the District will have a clear and positive benefit for both businesses and residents.
- (ii) **Impact on Equalities** – None identified.
- (iii) **Impact on Risk** – Lack of Superfast Broadband coverage will be a disincentive to firms seeking to establish or relocate into the area and those existing firms looking to expand existing operations and thereby impact adversely on job creation.
- (iv) **Impact on Resources (financial)** – To secure a wider coverage of Superfast Broadband will require a match funding contribution from Maldon District Council (MDC) of at least £90,994 as set out in paragraph 3.5 above.
- (v) **Impact on Resources (human)** – None identified.
- (vi) **Impact on the Environment** – Installation of fibre cabinets across the district will have only a minimal impact on the Environment.

Background Papers: None.

Enquiries to:

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