
Decision Session - Executive Leader

7 December 2010

Joint Report of the Director of Customer, Business and Support Services
and the Director of City Strategy

Broadband coverage in the City of York

Summary

1. This report seeks to provide an update on broadband infrastructure provision in the City of York and to set a strategic aim for businesses in the City to have broadband connections with speeds of at least 20Mbps by 2012. In setting this strategic objective, it is recognised that the Council will be mainly seeking to influence and facilitate the provision of this infrastructure by other organisations.
2. This report has a good strategic fit with the long term aspirations of the city in relation to all themes within the Sustainable Community Strategy, but particularly those in relation to Thriving City and Inclusive City.

Background

3. As part of its managed service contract with the City of York Council, Pinacl Solutions and one of their key partners H2O Networks (part of the i3 Group) started the work programme earlier in the year to establish a new dark fibre network around the city to provide core network services such as telephony and access to the Council's Systems and information across the city-wide Council's estate which including Schools, Libraries, Accommodation and Council offices as well as Sports Centres. This new network also has the ability to deliver other services including video conferencing, CCTV and a variety of Urban Traffic Management services.
4. In March this year, further discussions took place between the Council with Fibrecity Holdings Limited (also part of the i3 Group) to take forward a city-wide fibre optic network to which every premise (home and business) would be invited to opt in to have a direct 100Mbps connection. This proposal was considered by the Council's Executive who requested officers to review potential interest from other parties.
5. The last Government outlined its proposed plans to ensure universal 2Mbps broadband to every household in the UK; clearly, there is a distinct competitive advantage to the City of York if businesses and residents are able to access faster broadband speeds substantially in excess of this target.

Proposed broadband provision

6. Work is progressing well with the implementation of the Council's "dark fibre" network and as of November 12th, there were a total of 84 Council premises with direct access to fast broadband speeds with the intention that all premises, with access to this network by the end of January 2011. Discussions are continuing to take place as to how best to use the Council network for wider benefit.

7. The review of potential interest from other parties since March has provoked some response. Most notable, is the intention of BT to provide 46,000 homes in the York and Harrogate areas with super-fast broadband through a combination of fibre to premise and fibre to cabinet. Discussions have take place with BT to confirm the location and timing of provision within the City of York. Another network provider have also expressed an early interest in developing fast broadband infrastructure in more remote rural areas of the City. Again, this is being considered further with the company. Through the use of outstanding reserves from the former York and North Yorkshire Business Link company, NYnet are working on proposals to develop a number of “smart business parks” in York and North Yorkshire; this will include the Middlethorpe Business Park. The Council maintains a close working relationship with a key local provider, York Data Services, who supply networks to a considerable number of businesses in York. In addition, it is intended to continue to liaise with Fibrecity to see how they wish to take forward their proposals for a city-wide fibre optic network for all premises in York.
8. Therefore, there is the potential that the residents and business community within York could see a range of super-fast broadband provision becoming available if these early stage intentions become realised in the near future. The Council’s role is to essentially enable and facilitate this provision, without itself making any direct investment and central to this will be understanding the exact location of the infrastructure, how businesses and residents can benefit from this, identifying any gaps in provision and working with other parties to address these gaps.
9. York has already been recognised in an independent survey as being one of the top 10 cities in the UK for broadband speeds, but this level of intended broadband infrastructure provision would provide a real competitive advantage for existing businesses and would help support the attraction of new investment to the city.

Options

8. The options are to work with one or a number of parties interested in the provision of super-fast broadband in York. Given that the Council is effectively working in an enabling and facilitating way, it is recommended that the Council supports all initiatives to extend broadband provision where these are believed to be realistic and deliverable.

Corporate Priorities

9. The recommendation set out in this report support several elements of the Sustainable Community Strategy and the Council’s Corporate Strategy. The provision of super fast broadband is of particular benefit in building competitive advantage to support local businesses in line with the Thriving City strategic objectives. Similarly, this provision and the opportunity it could provide in relation to direct service provision to homes and businesses will also be beneficial in relation to all other key strategic themes.

Implications

Financial

10. It is not intended that the Council will investment in further broadband infrastructure beyond its commitment at present to its own “dark fibre” network.

Human Resources (HR)

11. None directly from this report.

Equalities

12. This initiative will seek to address equalities issues, particularly through the option to connect all homes in the city, potentially addressing issues related to the “digital divide”.

Legal

13. None directly from this report

Crime and Disorder

14. None directly from this report, although enhanced broadband provision could potentially to address crime and disorder issues through improved building security measures being available through service providers.

Information Technology (IT)

15. The proposal has a strong strategic fit with how the Council have secured and utilizing fibre network technologies to deliver existing services with the opportunities of expansion.

Property

16. There are no direct property implications, although the outcome from the work may enhance the Council's commercial portfolio.

Risk management

17. At this stage there is limited risk as there is no direct Council funding required and the commitment being sought is to enable the provision of infrastructure by other parties, with the Council effectively being asked to give its endorsement to the development of any networks. The risks therefore relate to any concerns about damage to the Council's reputation for reasons such as a delay in delivery of the network or a lack of appropriate service providers taking advantage of this.

Recommendations

18. That the Leader requests that officers continue to work with other parties interested in providing super-fast broadband in the City where these proposals are believed to be realistic and deliverable, with an overall strategic objective for businesses being able to have broadband connections with speeds of at least 20Mbps by 2012.

Reason: To support the strategic objectives of the Sustainable Community Strategy and Corporate Strategy.

Contact Details

Authors:

Roy Grant,
Head of IT
01904 551966

Roger Ranson
Assistant Director, Economic Development and
Partnerships
01904 551614

Chief Officer Responsible for the report:

Ian Floyd
Director of Resources

Bill Woolley
Director of City Strategy

Report Approved

For further information please contact the author of the report

Wards affected – ALL**Specialist implications officer**

Financial: Patrick Looker, Finance Manager, 551633