



Key Briefing: Superfast Broadband

February 2012

Keep up to speed: latest news from the Connecting Devon and Somerset Broadband Programme

Background

Our project is one of 3 national pilots chosen to roll out superfast broadband to the 'hard to reach' areas that will not attract private sector investment. With the help of funding from the Government and both County Councils, as well as support from partner authorities Plymouth, Torbay and North Somerset, we have £50m to invest, but this isn't enough on its own. We have to attract investment from broadband suppliers too. We are running a campaign (from 6th February) to ask the communities and businesses of Devon and Somerset to show that they want superfast broadband. We need as many people as possible to take part in a short survey which will be influential in deciding how, where and when the infrastructure will be rolled out. This is our one big opportunity to shape the future of our digital services, so it's vital everyone gets involved to help us get connected and up to speed.

'Connecting Devon and Somerset'

This is a project led by Somerset County Council and Devon County Councils in partnership with Plymouth, Torbay and North Somerset Councils, to roll out broadband to those parts of our counties not covered (or likely to be covered) by the private sector. The project aims to deliver:

- Improved broadband (>2mbps) to every business and community across Devon and Somerset by 2015
- Superfast broadband (>24mbps) to at least 85% of the area by 2015, with 100% by 2020

With commitment from both County Councils and support from a range of stakeholders including MPs, Heart of the South West LEP, the emergency services and many business organisations, the partnership secured circa £31m of funding from Government (BDUK). This is being matched by £20m from the two County Councils to buy the best broadband solutions for our communities. To get the best deal from the private sector, we need to show that there is real demand for superfast and improved broadband services. A short, dynamic campaign, '**Keep up to Speed: Get Connected**', is running from 6th -29th February to encourage residents, businesses and communities to register their interest. We need to evidence good market demand when negotiating with potential suppliers.

Why is this important?

£50m of public sector support will not be sufficient to achieve our aims. We need additional investment by the private sector, and to make this an attractive proposition, they will want to see a good potential return on their investment.

Through the campaign, residents, businesses and communities will be asked to register their broadband speed, the types of activity limited by current speeds and what improved connectivity might mean. The findings will be used during our negotiations with broadband suppliers. They will also be a factor, along with the potential for economic growth, social need and current speed influencing the eventual broadband roll out programme. It is a 'once in a lifetime' opportunity for communities and businesses to have a say in the services needed for their area.