
BROADBAND IMPROVEMENTS – PROPOSED REVIEW

Report by Executive Director EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

21 August 2018

1 PURPOSE AND SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report proposes that the Audit and Scrutiny Committee undertakes a review of the progress made in delivering improved broadband services in the Scottish Borders by the Digital Scotland Superfast Broadband programme.**
- 1.2 Improved digital connectivity is critical to the economic development and competitiveness of the Scottish Borders. Scottish Borders Council has contributed significantly to the roll-out of the Scottish Government's Digital Scotland Superfast Broadband (DSSB) programme, spending £8.4M over two years to help extend the roll-out as far as possible in the Scottish Borders. The Council's Administration has identified digital connectivity as a key priority in its 'Connected Borders' plan.
- 1.3 The DSSB Programme has now completed its main contract and the Scottish Government will be providing a final report on what the Programme has delivered for the Scottish Borders. This is an opportune time for the Council to consider how effective the delivery of the DSSB Programme has been in the Scottish Borders, and to consider whether the Council's investment has delivered the outcomes and value for money expected. Any lessons learnt that can be identified can be usefully highlighted to the Scottish Government as they commence preparations for the successor programme to DSSB (R100) which aims to connect 100% of premises across Scotland to superfast broadband. It is proposed that this review would be appropriately taken forward by the Audit and Scrutiny Committee.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 **I recommend that the Executive Committee:**
 - (a) Asks the Audit and Scrutiny Committee to undertake a review of the progress made in delivering improved broadband services in the Scottish Borders by the Digital Scotland Superfast Broadband Programme;**
 - (b) Agrees the scope of the review as set out in section 5.1; and**
 - (c) Asks the Audit and Scrutiny Committee to report its review findings at Executive on 4 December 2018.**

3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Good digital connectivity is crucially important to the future economic development and competitiveness of the Scottish Borders. It is clear that robust digital connectivity will be central to the delivery of private and public services and in meeting the needs and expectations of consumers, businesses and visitors. The Council Administration's plan, Connected Borders, highlights the importance it places on improving digital connectivity in the Scottish Borders.
- 3.2 Scottish Borders Council has made a significant financial contribution to the current roll-out of the Scottish Government's Digital Scotland Superfast Broadband (DSSB) programme, providing £8.4M over two years to help extend the roll-out as far as possible in the Scottish Borders. The DSSB Programme has now completed its main contract and a final report is expected from Scottish Government in September 2018.

4 REVIEW OF DIGITAL SCOTLAND SUPERFAST BROADBAND PROGRAMME

- 4.1 The indicative outcome for the Digital Scotland Superfast Broadband (DSSB) programme was to increase superfast broadband connection to 93.8% of premises in the Scottish Borders. This figure is based on commercial operators completing their plans in full. At the start of the programme in 2013, the anticipated commercial coverage of superfast broadband for Scottish Borders was just 39.3% of all premises. It is also expected that the 'Gainshare' element of the programme will add further coverage to the overall total.
- 4.2 As the DSSB programme has progressed it has become clear that there are a number of issues with how effectively it delivers in widely dispersed rural areas like the Scottish Borders and Dumfries & Galloway. On-going concerns have been raised by residents in different parts of the Scottish Borders, frustrated over the lack of clarity about when a service will become available and also whether they will actually see an improvement in service.
- 4.3 This is an appropriate time for the Council to consider how effectively the DSSB Programme has been delivered in the Scottish Borders and whether the anticipated outcomes have been achieved. The Council also needs to consider whether its investment has delivered the value for money expected. In order to undertake this review in an open and transparent way, it is proposed that this review is most appropriately taken forward by the Audit and Scrutiny Committee

5 SCOPE OF THE REVIEW OF THE DSSB PROGRAMME

- 5.1 It is recommended that the Audit and Scrutiny Committee review should include a range of issues related to the DSSB Programme in its scope. It is recommended that the review scope should be:
 - (a) an assessment of the final coverage delivered by Contract 1 of the DSSB Programme and the associated Gainshare project;
 - (b) the quality of that coverage and any variations between premises in towns, villages and the countryside. This would include speed coverage, long-line issues and other limitations that have become apparent during the rollout period;
 - (c) how appropriate and effective the communication processes used during the roll-out were, and whether appropriate information sharing and openness was evident to all stakeholders throughout the programme;
 - (d) did the Programme deliver appropriate value for money in relation to the Council's £8.4M investment;

- (e) how successful the take up of superfast broadband has been across the Scottish Borders; and
 - (f) identify appropriate lessons for future programmes, such as the new R100 Programme.
- 5.2 It is anticipated that this will be a high profile and important piece of work. It will be of wide public interest and of significant use as the Council considers, within its role in shaping the future priorities for the south of Scotland Enterprise Agency and in the Borderlands Growth Deal, how best to address the need for improved Broadband services across the Scottish Borders. The Council will also have the opportunity to influence delivery of the Government's R100 programme with the outcome of the review. Consequently there is some urgency for this work to be completed and it is recommended that the Audit and Scrutiny Committee should be asked to report its review findings at Executive on 4 December 2018.

6 IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Financial

There are no direct financial costs as a result of the recommendations of this report. The Council has spent £8.4M of capital funding as part of the Digital Scotland Superfast Broadband roll-out in order to extend that programme to connect as many premises as possible in the Scottish Borders.

6.2 Risk and Mitigations

There is a reputational risk to the Council if the DSSB Programme does not deliver improved services to as many premises as expected. This risk was mitigated by on-going involvement by Council officers in the programme management of the roll-out. Scottish Government and COSLA were also involved in managing the roll-out of the contract to ensure that the public funding involved was used as efficiently as possible, thus ensuring that as many premises as possible are served by the technology. The proposed review will consider the effectiveness of these mitigating actions.

6.3 Equalities

It is anticipated there are no adverse impacts due to race, disability, gender, age, sexual orientation or religious/belief arising from this report.

6.4 Acting Sustainably

The DSSB roll-out will contribute to the sustainability of local businesses and communities as it has facilitated the delivery of digital services and digital business opportunities to a large number of premises across the Scottish Borders.

6.5 Carbon Management

The DSSB rollout could reduce the need for travel and have a positive impact on carbon emissions.

6.6 Rural Proofing

While this report does not propose any new or amended policy, the DSSB rollout will improve digital connectivity in many rural areas.

6.7 Changes to Scheme of Administration or Scheme of Delegation

There are no changes to be made to the Scheme of Administration or Scheme of Delegation arising from this report.

7 CONSULTATION

- 7.1 The Chief Financial Officer, the Monitoring Officer, the Chief Legal Officer, the Chief Officer Audit and Risk, the Service Director HR and the Clerk to the Council have been consulted and their comments have been included in the report.

Approved by

Rob Dickson
Executive Director

Signature

Author(s)

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Background Papers:

Previous Minute Reference: Executive Committee, 30 January 2018

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