

Colchester Borough Council Digital Strategy

Communications Key messages:

- Colchester leads the way in delivering Next Generation Access Broadband Services. Provision of significantly higher speed broadband connectivity (typically 40 – 50 Mbps) and 4th Generation wireless (20 Mbps) to visitors, residents and businesses throughout the borough will make Colchester the first “high speed wireless town/city” in the UK and give a competitive edge, particularly over the next five years.
- Enhance the overall attractiveness of Colchester, supporting employment in sectors including retail, tourism and creative industries, and encouraging business relocation into the borough
- Addressing digital exclusion and the accompanying economic disadvantages in poorly served urban and rural areas through delivery of a Digital Wireless Town, High Speed Urban and Business Broadband and Rural Broadband (minimum 25 Mbps compared to current speeds of 0.5-2Mbps). 33% of residents and 25% of businesses are based in rural areas of the borough.
- The cost of broadband and digital services to the end user will be reduced and access to emerging technologies such as health telecare, smart metering and community IPTV will be enabled
- There are no financial contributions or risks for the Council in delivering the project which will generate up to £15 million of commercial investment in the Borough and provide best value from the Council’s town centre CCTV network. Significant and sustainable revenue income will be generated for the Council via provision of access to Council assets (street furniture, rooftops and ducting) for delivery partners, and a share of potential online sponsorship and advertising

Press release 14 July 2011

Colchester Cabinet Approves Strategy to Become UK's First High Speed Broadband Borough

Colchester Borough Council agreed at its meeting on Wednesday 13 July a Digital Strategy to provide superfast broadband, both wireless and fixed, throughout the borough. This will make Colchester the best connected place in Essex and the East of England.

The preferred suppliers, recommended in the report, to help deliver each of the three key initiatives that make up the Strategy were also approved, subject to contract negotiations being finalised. The preferred suppliers are: Digital Wireless Town recommended partner, The Cloud; High Speed Urban and Business Broadband recommended partner, Motorola and BriskNet; and Rural Broadband recommended partner, County Broadband. Short listing these providers, including household names and local companies, has taken place over recent months using industry standard criteria. This is a unique partnership between three established names in the industry that will provide total coverage across the Borough, delivering the Council's aim of addressing the market failure of poor urban mobile connectivity and very low suburban and rural Internet access speeds.

The proposals include providing significantly higher speed broadband connectivity (typically 40 – 50 Mbps) and 4th Generation wireless (20 Mbps) to visitors, residents and businesses throughout the borough. Colchester itself will become the first "high speed digital wireless town" in the UK, giving the borough a competitive edge, particularly over the next five years.

Stakeholders across the borough and region representing the local community, businesses and education have fully supported and encouraged the proposals and will continue to be involved in the roll-out process.

Delivery of the Strategy will enhance the attractiveness of Colchester for business, encouraging more to relocate into the borough because of its better connectedness. It will also support employment in many sectors already well represented in the borough including retail, tourism and creative industries which are "bandwidth hungry".

Significant improvements will be seen by the many people who currently experience digital exclusion and the accompanying economic disadvantages in urban and rural areas which have poor digital connectivity at present. A national survey conducted in October 2010 by the consumer site www.broadband-expert.co.uk found that the average download speed in the Borough was 4.2 Mbps, the eighth slowest in the UK. In some rural areas of the borough, which are home to 33% of residents and 25% of businesses, current broadband speeds are 0.5-2Mbps. The Rural Broadband proposals will increase this to a minimum 25 Mbps.

As well as benefitting from more efficient and effective digital access, residents, business and visitors will also see the cost of using these services reduce and access to a range of emerging technologies, such as health telecare, improve.

Up to £15 million of commercial investment in Colchester is expected. This will come through better use being made of the Council's town centre CCTV network, using the ducting and street furniture to deploy new communications fibre and wireless solutions, helping deliver best value from existing assets. The content and services delivered over this urban infrastructure will then be rolled out to suburban areas, business parks and rural communities over a combination of wireless and fibre technologies.

The Council will not have to make a financial investment in the project but will benefit from sustainable income through the provision of access to its street furniture, rooftops and ducting to enable the installation of micro aerials. Further potential income will also come from a share of online sponsorship and advertising revenue.

Colchester Borough Council Resource and ICT Portfolio Holder Councillor Paul Smith said: "Colchester Borough Council is leading the way in delivering Next Generation Access Broadband Services. This innovative project and unique partnership which could see up to £15 million invested in Colchester will help address the needs of people of all ages across the borough by helping them reap the benefits of the digital age, whether that be staying in touch, accessing business and services or enhancing their leisure time.

Colchester Borough Council Commerce and Sustainability Portfolio Holder, Councillor Nick Barlow, added, "Providing users with low cost digital access will also bring other benefits for Colchester by helping create safer communities and reducing the need to travel. The regular income for the Council through both giving the delivery partners access to some of the Council's assets to enable installation and the potential for a share of profits from online sponsorship will benefit the wider community by helping to avoid further potential service cuts."

- ENDS -

NOTE TO EDITORS:

For information

Contact Colchester Borough Council Press and PR Officer on communications@colchester.gov.uk, 07815 088150.

For comment or opinion please contact Councillors Paul Smith and/or Nick Barlow

Colchester Borough Council Resources and ICT Portfolio Holder, Paul Smith, phone: 07803 354058

Colchester Borough Council Commerce and Sustainability Portfolio Holder, Nick Barlow, phone: 01206 570753