



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Strategic Policy & Resources Committee
Subject:	Super Connected Belfast Update
Date:	24 th May 2013
Reporting Officer:	Ronan Cregan, Director of Finance & Resources
Contact Officer:	Paul Gribben, Head of ISB

1.	Relevant Background Information
1.1	On the 20 th of September 2012 the Department of Culture Media and Sport (DCMS) announced that Belfast had been successful in their bid to the Urban Broadband Fund (UBF) and were allocated the sum of £13.7 million.
1.2	The key features of our initial bid were: Provision of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 100% access to superfast broadband across the entire city. 2. Targeted Ultra-fast broadband for those sectors that deploy large volumes of data, such as the creative industries. 3. Wireless infrastructure within the city centre and other key locations, 4. And Micro-Fibre Grants to lower the barriers to ultrafast connectivity to SMEs.
1.3	One of the crucial aspects of the bid was the partnership programmes (demand stimulation) that would be put in place to make best use of the telecommunications infrastructure in order to derive maximum benefits for the city.
2.	Key Issues
2.1	Since the announcement of funding, the Council's Super Connected Belfast team has been working closely with DCMS, the key suppliers and the Roads Service. Finalisation of an agreed programme has been severely hampered by DCMS changing the scope of UBF funding on a number of occasions. This uncertainty has led to the demand stimulation element of the programme being curtailed.
2.2	On 8 May the Chief Executive received a letter from Ed Vaizey, the UK Minister for Culture, Communications and Creative Industries, informing the Council that

	<p>the fixed broadband elements of the UBF would no longer be part of the scope of all 10 cities projects. The reason being that it would take up to 18 months to resolve State Aid issues with the EU Commission. This means that the fixed superfast and ultrafast parts of the Council's project are no longer viable.</p>
2.3	<p>The letter also identifies a changed position in regards to the requirement for State Aid for the Micro-Fibre Grants (Vouchers) scheme. DCMS have committed to making a State Aid application to the EU Commission on behalf of all 10 cities. As a result, the Council's project will include a greater focus on the voucher scheme in order to maximise the take up of ultrafast broadband services. This will enable the original aim of providing business parks with ultrafast broadband to be achieved.</p>
2.4	<p>On 13 May the Council received notification from DCMS on the range of possible Wi-Fi options which cities could deliver. At this stage it would appear that the Council will be able to extend the wireless element of our proposal to target a large number of public buildings across Belfast (Leisure Centres, Community Centres, Hospitals etc...) with publically available Wi-Fi.</p>
2.5	<p>DCMS have asked for an update of project plans from all cities, in light of the recent changes. The revised plan will be presented to Committee as soon as feedback is received from DCMS.</p>
2.6	<p>Members are asked to note that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The initial award of £13.7 million remains allocated to Belfast. • The deadline for completion remains the 1st April 2015. • The original vision and objectives for the project still apply. • An important programme of demand stimulation work will underpin the technology programme.
3.	Resource Implications
3.1	<p>The Super-connected team from ISB and the Development department will continue to manage the delivery of this programme of work. The level of resource required will not increase, though re-planning will change the profile of resource expenditure.</p>
4.	Equality and Good Relations Implications
	N/A
5.	Recommendations
5.1	To note the changes to the Super Connected Belfast Project.
6.	Decision Tracking
	Officer responsible: Ronan Cregan
7.	Key to abbreviations
	DCMS – Department of Culture Media and Sport