



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.

What will happen?

Briefings for key stakeholders are taking place now beginning with a direct mail campaign across the area. From 6th February, information leaflets will be sent to 26,000 business and residential addresses in 10 sample areas across Somerset and Devon. People at these addresses will then be asked to respond to a survey through a follow up phone call. There will also be features in local newspapers, radio and TV programmes, to reach people who are not in one of the sample areas. They can register their interest online at www.connectingdevonandsomerset.co.uk or by calling our dedicated hotline on 0844 463887. The findings from this survey will be analysed in March to show demand for broadband before we commence the next phase of procurement in April to achieve the most effective solution.

As many may not be aware of the difference the improved service could make, we will also provide information on the benefits to ensure that our communities are included, our businesses can benefit and residents are not disenfranchised by lack of access.

There will be a dedicated phone line and mailbox and further information on the Connecting Devon and Somerset website: www.connectingdevonandsomerset.co.uk. People may respond through their place of work as well as their home set up.

Timetable

Campaign activity	6- 29 February
National Broadband Suppliers framework established	May 2012
Award of Devon and Somerset broadband partner contract	September 2012
Launch of business and community demand campaign	June 2012
Launch of business and community skills campaign	September 2012
Deployment and roll out schedule announcement	Jan / February 2013

What do we need?

We need as many responses as possible! We are briefing stakeholders, asking community groups, businesses, employer representative organisations and many others to prime their colleagues, members and friends to be ready to respond. Their input is vital to ensuring effective roll out of services and it is unlikely there will ever be another similar opportunity.

Superfast broadband has the capacity to change lives and we want to ensure Devon and Somerset are at the forefront of the digital revolution.

APPENDIX: the current picture

20% of our 6,000 survey respondents (2011) (businesses and individuals) only receive 1Mbps. The private sector is currently only committed to delivering superfast broadband access to 38% of premises, and this is predicted to rise to 62% by 2015. This leaves 26,000 businesses with a turnover of £9 billion and 700,000 people with no certainty of improved connectivity

Devon County	Somerset County
Average sync speed (Mbit/s): 6.4	Average sync speed (Mbit/s): 6
Percentage getting less than 2Mbit/s: 17.2%	Percentage getting less than 2Mbit/s: 17.7%
Superfast broadband availability: 17%	Superfast broadband availability: 4%
Broadband take up: 69%	Broadband take up: 70%

(Ofcom)

Faster broadband will:

- Be the 21st century infrastructure that enables **our businesses to compete** on a level footing regardless of location
- Make Devon and Somerset a more **attractive proposition for business relocations** and start-ups – including the creation of new, high-tech jobs
- **Enable the transformation of public services** through initiatives such as: telehealth, improving patient care in their homes; community safety through greater and more efficient use of CCTV; law enforcement through improving remote working and communications, and distance learning
- **Enable improved business efficiency and flexibility**, for example through speedier communication, better access to new markets and greater homeworking
- **Facilitate improved skills levels** through access to online learning
- **Tackle digital exclusion**, ensuring rural communities have the same access to services as urban communities

Opportunities for involvement

Our partners and stakeholders are key to the success of this campaign. We welcome your involvement through:

- Promoting, publicising and championing the campaign and survey
- Participating in events
- Identifying opportunities for further briefings, events and media coverage
- Communicating the project through your own networks and social media channels
- Letting us know how best to keep you in touch with project progress.
- Identifying who we need to talk to in your communities or what would enable you to talk to other people about the campaign

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