

Decision Pathway report

PURPOSE: Key decision

MEETING: Cabinet

DATE: 06 October 2020

TITLE	Avonmouth Fibre Extension – BNET extension project		
Ward(s)	Horfield, Southmead, Henbury & Brentry, Avonmouth & Lawrence Weston		
Author:	Emma Howarth / Phil Higgins	Job title: BNET Service Manager / Project Manager	
Cabinet lead:	Cllr Craig Cheney	Executive Director lead: Stephen Peacock	
Proposal origin: BCC Staff			
Decision maker: Cabinet Member			
Decision forum: Cabinet			
Purpose of Report:			
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Get Cabinet endorsement for the Avonmouth Fibre Extension (AFE) project to support better broadband connectivity for the North West of the city (enabling fibre infrastructure). Evidence needed by DCMS to progress project. 2. Gain prior approval of expected grant offer (£1.7m) from DCMS for the funding of this scheme. Needed as demanding timescale for grant acceptance and delivery. 			
Evidence Base:			
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. All UK cities now recognise that full fibre connectivity is key to their future prosperity. Bristol is currently at 35% availability in premises, but coverage is commercially led with no plans in some parts of the city. Full fibre is far faster, more reliable, greener and supports business innovation, productivity and new ways of working and learning. 2. Bristol needs to improve connectivity to public buildings and services across the city, and particularly in the North West of the city, where we have no active BNET (council duct and fibre network) presence. There are also no commercial plans from Openreach to roll out this technology in these wards 3. Extending BNET (council duct and fibre network) in this area will encourage telecoms companies to build out to homes and businesses and provide full fibre connectivity increasing digital inclusion, including the Avonmouth & Severnside Enterprise Area – thus supporting economic development. The project will address (make it easy to connect) 49 public buildings, including schools, libraries and community training venues, and support inclusive growth. 4. The council has existing unused duct in the area which is currently being surveyed (DCMS funded) and can be refurbished to carry fibre optic cables in an externally funded project under the Local Full Fibre Network (LFFN) programme from DCMS. As we will re-use 18.4km of council underground asset – this is a greener scheme than new build. Approximately 5km of new build duct in the footway is needed to join the project to BNET, address public buildings and provide the network with resilience from fibre strikes (when the connection is disrupted by digging) to maintain connection. 5. A very time limited window exists to secure this funding, as the government’s fibre programme has now shifted to rural areas. No further urban funding for full fibre deployment is envisaged. This is a legacy project for DCMS where the business case has been accepted by DCMS’ Investment Panel, but we still need to confirm funding and commence delivery in October 2020. We will lose funding to rural areas if we don’t achieve sign off in October. 6. DCMS grant applications under the LFFN programme require applicants to address potential state aid issues in connection with the use of any grant. To assist in addressing this issue a report has been commissioned (following a procurement exercise) from consultants (Analysys Mason – a firm with experience in the fibre optics field) who will review the Councils business case, assess the commerciality of the proposed project and present a report to the Council. 			
Cabinet Member / Officer Recommendations:			
That Cabinet:			
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Approves the Avonmouth Fibre Extension (AFE) project to support better broadband connectivity for the North West of the city (enabling fibre infrastructure). 2. Approves the making of an application to DCMS for a grant of £1.7m under the LFFN programme. 3. Authorises the Executive Director for Growth and Regeneration in consultation with the Deputy Mayor Finance, Governance and Performance and s.151 Officer - in the event that the DCMS application is successful - to accept the grant and to take all steps required to enter into any agreements or contracts to spend the grant to deliver the 			

Avonmouth Fibre Extension project.

Corporate Strategy alignment:

1. A key element of Bristol's Smart City strategy 'Connecting Bristol - laying the foundations for a smart, well-connected future' (www.connectingbristol.org.uk). Bristol's smart strategy commits the city to delivering world class connectivity by accelerating full fibre, recognising its essential role in underpinning our smart future.
2. The Council's Corporate Plan 2018-2023 includes being "Well Connected" as a core theme and this BNET extension is designed to help fulfil this objective and also our strategic aim of reducing 'social and economic isolation'.
3. The One City Plan includes a commitment to ensure disadvantaged communities are not left behind and inclusive growth. AFE is in an area with no commercial plans for full fibre.

City Benefits:

1. AFE will make it easy for 50+ public service buildings e.g. schools, libraries, health & social care facilities near to the route to benefit from gigabit-enabled broadband
2. Users of public service locations which will be passed by AFE will benefit from better broadband – faster, more reliable, easily coping with speed and bandwidth intensive uses e.g. streaming / e-learning / home working
3. AFE unlocks 7km of new unused duct in Avonmouth which will improve options for businesses to get full fibre, improving their productivity, e-commerce offer and ability to support new ways of working e.g. home working
4. The extension sees 8km (21%) of the fibre network pass through areas in the 20% most deprived areas (IMD) in the country. The presence of a full fibre backhaul network will encourage other Communications Providers / investors to build out to the Council's social housing in the area supporting inclusive growth and encouraging service competition.
5. AFE is an enabling network to attract commercial investment from telecoms companies and improve choice and competition in the broadband market thus improving options for homes and businesses to get better broadband. As COVID shows, the quality of home broadband to support flexible working is vital.
6. This enabling network can be built with external funding if we act quickly to capitalise on this time limited offer (Government strategy now orientated at rural areas).

Consultation Details:

Internal consultation with: Highways; EDT; ICT Networks; WECA; South Gloucestershire Council; Trading with Schools; economic development

External partner consultation: WECA; SGC; Severnet

As enabling infrastructure largely using existing underground assets, there has been no need for public consultation at this stage. Our communications and engagement plan covers notification of works to premises adjacent to the project for the 5km of new build duct, and for conveying the wider benefits of the scheme.

Background Documents: Outline business case attached

Revenue Cost	£0	Source of Revenue Funding	Not applicable
Capital Cost	£1.7m	Source of Capital Funding	DCMS
One off cost <input type="checkbox"/>	Ongoing cost <input type="checkbox"/>	Saving Proposal <input type="checkbox"/>	Income generation proposal <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Required information to be completed by Financial/Legal/ICT/ HR partners:

1. Finance Advice:

The total cost of this work for which funding is required is £1.7m and includes provision for risks and contingencies. Recent surveys have provided additional assurance that the level of contingency provide for is adequate. DCMS has already provided £172k, for a proving survey to ascertain the true state of the council's BNET underground assets which forms phase 1, of this scheme and it almost complete.

1. The report seeks approval for the submission of a bid to DCMS for £1.7m to fund the next phase of work, as well as authority to spend the grant if successful. The grant funding is expected to cover 100% of the infrastructure costs, thus there is no new financial implication for the council.
2. If successful, the necessary grant acceptance and monitoring protocol will be followed in line with the Councils Financial regulations.

Finance Business Partner: Kayode Olagundoye

2. Legal Advice: DCMS grant applications under the LFFN programme require applicants to address potential state aid issues in

connection with the use of any grant. To assist in addressing this issue a report has been commissioned from consultants (Analysys Mason) which report will reviewed by Legal Services. Should the grant application be successful authority is also being sought to proceed with commissioning all necessary contracts (goods, works and services) required to implement the project without further reference to Cabinet, notwithstanding that some contracts may exceed the key decision threshold. All procurement activities will need to comply with the Public Contracts Regulations 2015, and the Councils own procurement rules.

Legal Team Leader: Eric Andrews, Team Leader, Legal Services,

3. Implications on IT: ICT Services recognise the benefits of securing external funding for this infrastructure scheme but we will need to clarify how public buildings are connected at a later date (beyond the scope of this project). Previous utilisation of corporate IT assets for the provision of non-corporate network services has been confirmed as inappropriate by information assurance colleagues (and could place our security compliance at risk), so the need for considering this alongside other Smart City initiatives is clear. As we move forward, this project will be considered in a wider context, in terms of how the connectivity is funded and managed – alongside all other smart city innovations - in order to utilise the BNET ducting asset in a safe and compliant manner, and to maximise the long-term benefits. Investing in the ducting infrastructure alongside finding credible delivery partners for digital services will support the One City objectives, and improve Cyber Security for the Council.

IT Team Leader: Simon Oliver, Director – Digital Transformation, 21/09/2020

4. HR Advice: No implications – NA – nobody will need to be recruited as a result of this scheme for enabling infrastructure

HR Partner: NA

EDM Sign-off	Stephen Peacock	12 August
Cabinet Member sign-off	Councillor Craig Cheney	10 September
For Key Decisions - Mayor's Office sign-off	Mayor's Office	14 September

Appendix A – Further essential background / detail on the proposal	YES
Appendix B – Details of consultation carried out - internal and external	NO
Appendix C – Summary of any engagement with scrutiny	NO
Appendix D – Risk assessment	NO
Appendix E – Equalities screening / impact assessment of proposal	YES
Appendix F – Eco-impact screening/ impact assessment of proposal	YES
Appendix G – Financial Advice	NO
Appendix H – Legal Advice	NO
Appendix I – Exempt Information	NO
Appendix J – HR advice	NO
Appendix K – ICT	NO
Appendix L – Procurement	NO