

EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

NORTHERN AREA LOCAL COMMITTEE - 11 MARCH 2004

PROVISION OF ADSL BROADBAND SERVICES

Report by Director of Development Services

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To advise the Committee of progress in securing the provision of Broadband technology and services for Stewarton.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Broadband is a generic term for some modern technologies to transmit data. ADSL is the version of that technology which transmits data electronically over existing telephone lines. The range of other available technologies includes wireless and satellite.

- 2.2 Broadband technology and in particular ADSL has important benefits for all users, including :

- Internet access is through a separate line to which constant access is available and which allows the telephone line to remain free for voice calls;
- Direct and continuous access to the world-wide-web;
- Access to an increasingly important means of providing information and transacting business;
- Faster downloading of files, in comparison to “dial-up” systems;
- Flat rate monthly charges.

There is however a limitation on ADSL technology in relation to the distance from the exchange over which the technology can be used (currently around 5 kilometres). There will be instances where due to remote locations, ADSL service is not available to subscribers although the exchange from which they receive their telephone service has been enabled.

- 2.3 As a means of sourcing information, conducting transactions and communication, the use of the internet is becoming an increasingly important aspect of all areas of life, including business, education, government, community and personal use.

- 2.4 The potential of Broadband is now widely and publicly acknowledged and “enablement” of local exchanges to provide broadband capability is a strategic priority of government at all levels.

- 2.5 Once a telephone exchange is enabled to provide Broadband, subscribers can use any Internet Service Provider (ISP) of their choice, from a BT approved list. Selection becomes a matter of personal choice, based on the product offered and cost.

3 PROMOTION OF BROADBAND

- 3.1 As the national network of telephone exchanges is within the responsibility of British Telecom (BT), the lead responsibility for the promotion of broadband rests with BT. The majority of broadband services is delivered through “cable providers”.
- 3.2 BT is working towards a target of having the whole of Scotland “enabled” for ADSL Broadband by 2005 and to achieve this, BT is committed to working in local partnerships. The Ayrshire Economic Forum embraced this opportunity and a local partnership involving the three local authorities, Scottish Enterprise Ayrshire, the Ayrshire Chamber of Commerce and Industry and Kilmarnock College was established.
- 3.3 Ayrshire has been identified by BT as one of the areas of Scotland in which they see potential for an increased uptake in the usage of Broadband and in which they are therefore keen to encourage interest.
- 3.4 BT sets “trigger” level figures for most exchanges. These “triggers” are expressions of interest in Broadband which are gathered from registrations lodged on the internet and from local field marketing campaigns.
- 3.5 Local marketing is supported by the identification of a “local champion” who acts in a voluntary capacity to encourage awareness and take-up of Broadband.
- 3.6 Once the “trigger” has been achieved, BT commit to the investment required to “enable” the local exchange to provide Broadband services. The timetabling for this work is announced with a projected “ready for service” date, which is typically about 3 months after the “trigger” has been achieved.

4 PROVISION OF BROADBAND IN THE COMMITTEE’S AREA

- 4.1 The telephone exchanges within the area of the Committee are at Fenwick and Stewarton.

4.2 The position in respect of each exchange is as follows

Exchange	Trigger Level	Registrations at 18 February 2004	Projected date for achievement of "Trigger"	Announced "Ready for Service" date
Fenwick	150	111 (74%)	15 March 2004	N/A
Stewarton	500	345 (69%)	N/A	17 March 2004

- 4.3 A "field marketing campaign" was undertaken in Fenwick on 18 February 2004 and the results of this exercise will be available through the website (URL www.adslguide.co.uk) within the course of the next few weeks. An update, accurate to the date of the Committee meeting, will be presented verbally at the meeting.
- 4.4 The information above indicates that although the "trigger" level at Stewarton has not been achieved, a commitment has already been made by BT to proceed with the enablement of the exchange.
- 4.5 It is understood that this decision was prompted as a direct result of the commitment made by the Ayrshire Economic Forum to work in partnership with BT and was based on a commercial judgement which involved consideration of a range of factors including the level of business presence in the exchange area and the rate of increase in the registrations to date.
- 4.6 Although as noted at para 2.5 above, subscribers can contract with an ISP of their choice, the important issue is to ensure that the expressions of interest which prompted the achievement of the "trigger level" are converted to subscriptions to the broadband service.
- 4.7 Scottish Enterprise Ayrshire operates a "Broadband Demonstration Centre" in Irvine where assistance is available to businesses to work towards full electronic trading. An officer working group of the Ayrshire Economic Forum is also considering the issues of encouraging businesses located in areas where the exchanges have been enabled towards the use of broadband as a business tool.

5 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The forthcoming availability of ADSL broadband in the Committee's area accords with the objectives of the East Ayrshire Community Plan, particularly under the themes of :

- Promoting community learning; and
- Improving opportunities

5.2 In addition, the achievement of the strategic goals of the Ayrshire Economic Forum (as expressed in the strategy document "Ayrshire: Scotland's Western Gateway) will be assisted by the provision of ADSL broadband in the Committee's area.

6. LEGAL AND FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 There are no legal or financial implications (other than the commitment of officer time) for the Council arising from this report.

7. RECOMMENDATION

7.1 That the Committee notes the terms of this report.

STEPHEN CHORLEY
Director of Development Services

19 February 2004/jrs

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Nil

For further information please contact JOHN SPOONER, Business Development Manager on Extension 6143.

Implementation Officer : JOHN SPOONER