



REPORT FROM: HOUSING, HEALTH AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT SERVICES MANAGER

TO: EXECUTIVE

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BARNOLDSWICK AND COLNE TOWN CENTRE WI-FI UPDATE

PURPOSE OF REPORT

To update Members on the issues that has arisen with the installation of Wi-Fi in Colne and Barnoldswick and determine the way forward.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- (1) That the likelihood of increased costs and timescale is noted and the Executive Members decide whether to progress with the project.
- (2) If members agree to progress this project that the increase in costs be referred to the, Transfer of Services and Facilities to Town and Parish Councils Committee to determine if they are able/willing to meet these costs.
- (3) If the Executive and the Transfer of Services and Facilities to Town and Parish Councils Committee wish to pursue the project that approval is given for a new tendering process to replace the original contractor.

REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION

To provide a free Wi-Fi facility within Barnoldswick and Colne town centres.

BACKGROUND

The Gearing Up For Growth panel have investigated the possibility of installing Wi-Fi in Barnoldswick and Colne town centres as pilots to determine whether the project delivers enough benefits to install in other Pendle town centres. Some of the benefits of providing a Wi-Fi service include:

- Branded User Experience Portal (UEP) upon login showing shops, restaurants and other information. This could be used to advertise local businesses and events. Aiming to encourage visitors to use the town centres for longer periods of time.
- Data gathered for use by the Council, not third parties. Information such as contact email address, age, address can be requested when accessing the Wi-Fi. The Council could stipulate what information is required to gain access.
- E-newsletters to keep people up to date with local events could be sent using the data captured.
- Marketing opportunities and data analytics. For example where people have travelled from and where they have logged onto the Wi-Fi.

Some of the limitations of accessible town centre Wi-Fi include:

- Administration/man power required to analyse data to make it useful.
- Technology advancements possibly making the system obsolete within a few years, with increased availability and use of smartphones.

After the initial investigations and costing exercises the Panel decided to hand over the detailed delivery of the project to the respective Area Committees (February 2015). The Area Committees were asked to consider various options put forward by the initially selected contractor, Clannet who at the time offered the best value for money solution.

The Gearing Up For Growth Panel agreed to allocate funding maximum of £15,000 for the installation of Wi-Fi in Colne and Barnoldswick town centres, depending on the preferred option chosen by the respective area committees. The initial installation costs for both towns was estimated to be approximately £7,500 plus additional monthly running costs.

Colne Committee were asked to consider various options based on initial estimates by Clannet and agreed the following option - Create a new wireless network using various points across the town centre. Total = £4500.

West Craven Committee agreed that a small working group be set up, consisting of representatives from Pendle Council, Barnoldswick Town Council and the Town Council Action Group to examine in more detail the various options for town centre Wi-Fi in Barnoldswick and for recommendations to come back to this Committee, and that Barnoldswick Town Council be asked if they would agree to pick up the ongoing annual costs of the internet connection and service support.

Following a meeting of the Barnoldswick working group Clannet were instructed to work up a project plan for the installation of Wi-Fi using the existing CCTV system as a base, with an estimated cost of £1,500-3,000. After further investigation and dialogue with the contractor responsible for the CCTV system it was concluded that upgrades of the system and installation would actually cost - £13,979.00 (Exc. VAT).

Unfortunately Clannet have subsequently decided that they no longer wish to undertake the project in Barnoldswick and Colne, they have not given any specific reasons for this.

In light of the situation in Barnoldswick, it is extremely likely that the costs given by Clannet were underestimated in both towns. We therefore anticipate that the cost to the Area Committees and Town Councils will increase if we wish to proceed with this project.

New Estimated Project Costs (August 2015)

Following the dramatic increase from the initial conservative estimates and subsequent loss of provider, the Gearing Up For Growth panel advised that a new contractor should be sought and that new more realistic cost estimates should be received.

We have undertaken some desktop research and have found that Wi-Fi Spark, based in Exeter carried out a similar scheme in Kendal, and have provided Wi-Fi solutions on a number of scales across the UK. Wi-Fi Spark have provided a detailed plan and project costs for Colne and Barnoldswick .But in summary they have estimated that the cost would be approximately:

Installation Cost

- Barnoldswick – £30,839.01(net amount) £37,006.81(inc VAT)
- Colne £19,370.20 (net amount) £23,244.24 (inc VAT)

Monthly Costs

- Barnoldswick - £406.17 (net amount) £487.40 (inc VAT)
- Colne - £273.70 (net amount) £328.44 (inc VAT)

Funding Options

The Gearing Up For Growth panel has a set aside a budget of £15,000 towards the project. Clearly this is no longer sufficient and progress will depend on the Area Committees increasing their contribution or finding alternative sources of funding to make up the difference. Listed below are some alternatives that could be considered.

- Business Improvement Districts - A defined area within which businesses are required to pay an additional tax (or levy) in order to fund specific projects within the district's boundaries. All businesses within a set area would be balloted, with a majority having to agree before a levy can be introduced.
- Crowd Funding - Crowdfunding is a way of raising finance by asking a large number of people each for a small amount of money. Crowdfunding uses the internet to attract potential funders. Mansfield Business Improvement District have recently run a campaign to fund their town Centre Wi-Fi and raised a target about of £36, 363 (although one major sponsor contributed £20,000 and the local town team £7,000)
- Sponsorship – additional funding could be sought through sponsorship for example local business could pay for an advert on the landing page. The likely revenue from such sponsorship would be relatively low.
- Paid service – the free Wi-Fi periods provided in town centres can be capped, and a charge can be made for further use. This could reduce the monthly fees. Income is likely to be minimal.

IMPLICATIONS

Policy: Improving the viability and services to the town centres

Financial: £15,000 Funding allocated from the Gearing up for Growth Programme, with an additional outlay to be considered through the options listed in the main report.

Legal: relevant permissions for installation sought.

Risk Management: Closely monitor project to ensure completion within timescales and budget.

Health and Safety: Relevant contractors to work within health and safety rules and supply risk assessments

Sustainability: Improving the viability and services to the town centres

Community Safety: Potential improvement to the existing CCTV system in Colne

Equality and Diversity: Wi-Fi will be available to all town centre users with a compatible device

APPENDICES