HAS **SUPERFAST** BROADBAND REACHED YOU?

A broadband boost for Berkshire businesses

Berkshire's six unitary councils and Thames Valley Berkshire Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) joined together to work on a government-backed project 'Superfast Berkshire' with the aim of connecting the whole region to superfast broadband.

The project initially aimed to provide basic broadband at speeds of at least 2Mbps to all Berkshire premises and access to superfast broadband with speeds of 24Mbps or faster to 91 per cent of premises by the end of 2015.

To connect the last nine per cent of hardest to reach homes and businesses, Berkshire's councils are using a mix of private and public sector funded projects to drive superfast broadband coverage to the area.

Access to fast broadband is essential for modern businesses to improve efficiency and thrive. Berkshire businesses in rural and urban areas have typically missed out on speedy broadband as a result of being located in areas not considered commercially viable by private companies. Particularly affected were businesses in industrial estates and business parks, suffering from speeds as slow as 2Mbps: barely enough for a Skype video call.

Superfast Berkshire identified businesses struggling because of poor broadband access, then engaged with high-speed internet provider WarwickNet, who initially provided a range of broadband solutions to three sites across Berkshire, with further plans to extend their network to an additional 60 industrial estates and business parks across the county.

Case study:
Berkshire unitary councils

In 2015, Superfast Berkshire awarded contracts with superfast suppliers Gigaclear which should see West Berkshire, the most rural Berkshire district, reach almost 100 per cent superfast coverage by the end of 2017, whilst their contract with Call Flow Solutions will provide upgrades to 1,750 premises in Windsor and Maidenhead. This will take the overall superfast coverage for Berkshire to in excess of 95 per cent by the end of 2017.

Superfast Berkshire remains actively engaged with a number of other broadband suppliers who are working to provide a planned expansion of their networks through their own commercial programmes – this activity requires no public funding. This combined with a further injection of public funds will drive the county towards its ultimate objective of total superfast coverage.

Councillor Stuart Munro, Deputy Executive Member for Economic Development and Finance at Wokingham Borough Council added: "This is a significant investment in improving broadband connectivity in our area and is key to securing our ambitions for economic growth. In addition to improving the quality and speed of the coverage it will also provide businesses with more choice and will help ensure our local economy remains competitive."

Jo Lovelock, Leader for Reading Borough Council said: "Without sufficiently fast broadband businesses are stifled, with limited options for flexible working, barriers to both international markets and online order and delivery services. A lack of broadband forces businesses – particularly in the creative industries – out of an area, leading to fewer job opportunities and ultimately economic decline.

"We welcome the investment and innovation from technology companies such as WarwickNet in helping to deliver superfast broadband infrastructure into our business parks which directly supports our local business economy."

Thomas Smith, Business Development Manager at WarwickNet, said: "Of course there are still connectivity blackspots in built up areas such as Reading and so when Superfast Berkshire told us that businesses were receiving speeds as slow as 2 Mbps, we were happy to step in and provide the solutions they needed."

To find out more about Berkshire's business broadband success, visit www.superfastberkshire.org.uk