



This document summarises the proposals from a project undertaken by Rose Regeneration for West Devon Borough Council, South Hams District Council and Torridge District Council.

The objective of the project was to look at how Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) could be used to deliver public services in small villages across the three Council areas.¹

The proposals set out what a community access and information point may look like, suggest locations where these facilities could be located, and provide guidance for their implementation.

¹ By ICT we mean any product that can store, transmit or receive information electronically in a digital form (for example: personal computers, digital television, and email).

The Village Hub

Community Access and Information Points



The need for the project

The Government's 'Digital Britain' Report recognised how ICT could offer a more efficient way to deliver public services. A number of initiatives across Devon have taken up the "Digital Britain" agenda – this includes work by the County Council on broadband 'not-spots' and community websites. However less work has been done looking at broadband connectivity and the use of ICT to deliver public services in smaller settlements.

ICT is already changing the way some councils work. For example it is now possible for residents to be assessed for benefits from the comfort of their home, through eBenefits technology. Interactive council websites have also improved access to services for some people.

Broadband and ICT

The project looked at the availability of broadband in villages with a population of 100-1,000 across the three Districts. This included 65 settlements in South Hams, 44 settlements in Torridge and 35 settlements in West Devon – from Tuckenhay in South Hams with a population of 100, to Winkleigh in Torridge with a population of 943.

Just seven villages had no access to broadband: Northlew², Throwleigh, Diptford³, Ugborough, Malborough, Hope Cove and Petrockstow. All of the

All three Councils aim to provide high quality, accessible and cost effective services and work with other public agencies and across boundaries to do so. All three Councils have 'Access to Services' Strategies and offer staffed outreach surgeries. Unfortunately it is not possible to provide an outreach surgery in every settlement.

While ICT would not replace staffed outreach surgeries, making better use of technology would enable citizens to access services outside of surgery hours or where surgeries currently do not take place.

other villages had access to broadband and are capable of supporting a community access and information point - though the speed of the coverage varies: 58% of citizens in Torridge have good connectivity (over 2Mbps), this figure is slightly higher in South Hams (61%), with the best coverage of all in West Devon (65%).

² The residents of Northlew have established a Community Interest Company (CIC) to bring high speed broadband to the village and surrounding areas.

³ To overcome poor connectivity, Diptford Parish Hall hosts a computer club for local residents.

Using ICT to deliver public services

To find examples of how ICT had been used to deliver services elsewhere, a 'National Call for Evidence' was circulated by the Rural Services Network (RSN). The Call generated 163 responses from 113 organisations.

The responses highlighted the importance of community support, the importance of choosing the right location and the importance of all agencies (Council and non-council) working together to provide services.

The Evidence Call revealed a wide range of approaches. Some of the responses were examples where a broadband connection had been used to provide access to a Council website; others were examples of how "touch screens" had been used so citizens could enter a booth, press a button and speak to Council staff via a video link.

The outcomes of this research led the project to develop proposals for the establishment of community access and information points.



TellyTalk video link system in operation at Langold Village Hall, Nottinghamshire

Community Access and Information Points

The project developed a specification for these Points in community venues (e.g. village halls, shops/post offices) where ICT equipment could be provided for citizens to use free-of-charge. The Points would have broadband connection to the internet and allow citizens to access Council information and services as well as services provided by other public organisations.

The project identified a number of proposals for providing access to services. The ICT equipment for the Points can be chosen at different levels of specification from 'straightforward' (Model A) at one end, to 'interactive' (Model C) at the other end. The Models are:

- **Model A:** A computer, printer and scanner;
- **Model B:** A computer, printer, scanner and videoconferencing equipment;
- **Model C:** A computer, printer, scanner, touch-screen, videoconferencing equipment (Telly Talk), signature pad and headset.

The proposals vary from providing a simple web access facility (Model A) to using a camera to take photographs and pad for electronic signatures to process applications online (Model C).

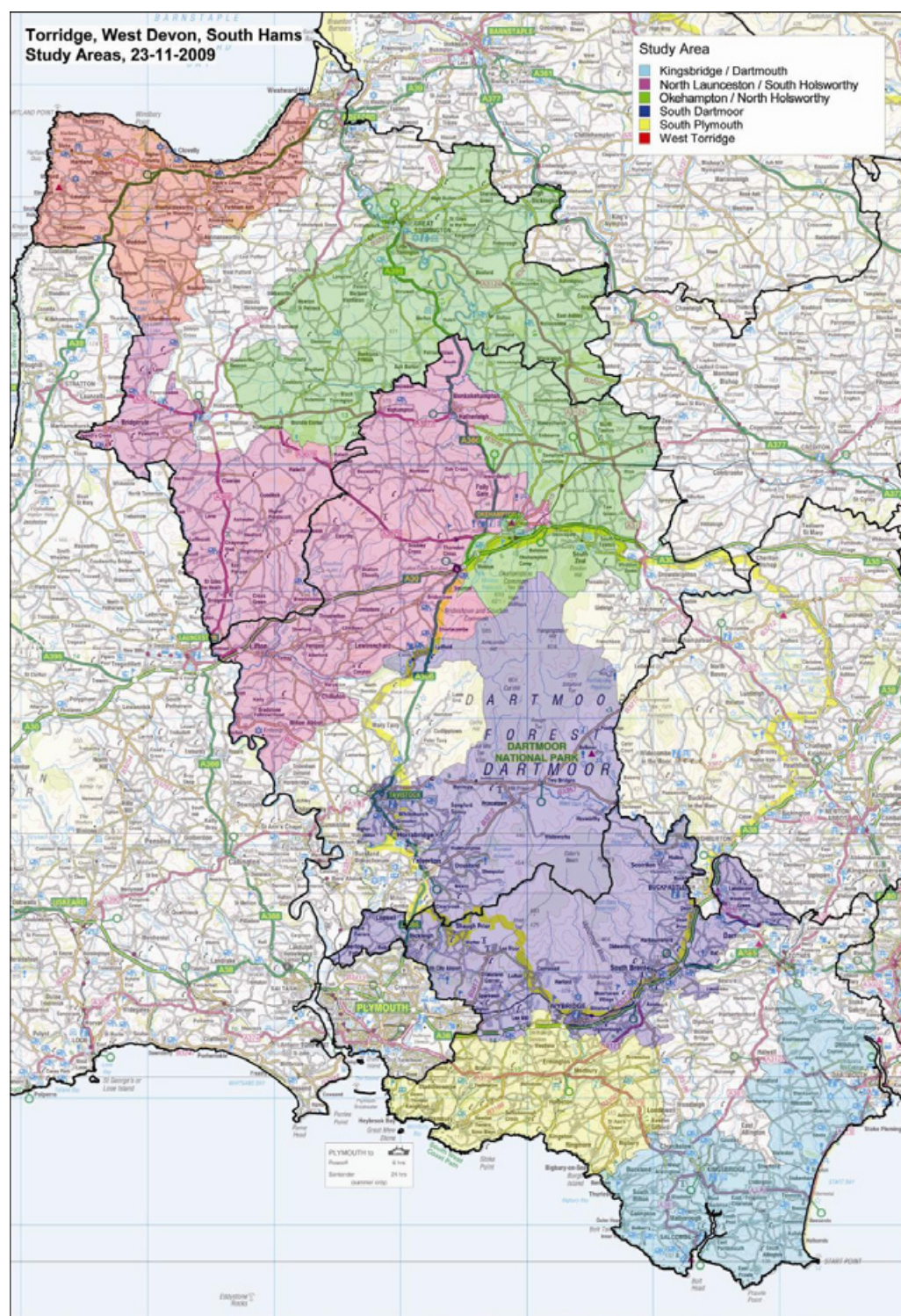
For each Model, costed implementation plans with an explanation of how they would be delivered and over what time scale were provided.

The project also proposed having a dedicated "Village Hub" website. The website would introduce the Points and their locations and have a page for each service provider to outline their activities relevant to the three Districts.



Community Engagement

Volunteers are key to the delivery of an ICT led approach. The village hub project presents new opportunities for Councils to engage with small rural communities, to build local capacity around accessing services, and to train volunteers on the work of the Council and other service providers. The national call for evidence and local community input have demonstrated significant community enthusiasm for becoming involved in supporting access and information points.



Location, Location, Location

The project identified six cluster areas where there was likely to be most need for community access and information points. This was done by looking at information on rural isolation and on users with higher levels of support needs. The cluster areas were: West Torridge, Okehampton/North Holsworthy, North Launceston/South Holsworthy, South Dartmoor, South Plymouth and Kingsbridge/Dartmouth. Within each cluster, villages with good access to community buildings and appropriate connectivity that could potentially host a Point were identified.

What happens next?

Overall, the project highlights a number of options and scenarios for using ICT to deliver public services. Many of the proposals build on on-going initiatives within the three Council areas and their commitment to working with communities to provide local solutions. We hope to take the proposals forward, however this would be subject to external funding becoming available.

You can download the full project report from www.westdevon.gov.uk/villagehubreport

To offer your involvement – perhaps you would like to host an access and information point, join a working group or for more information about the project please contact:

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