

WiFi first for Swindon residents

Swindon will be the first town to give all 186,000 residents free internet access when its £1m WiFi 'mesh' goes live next month.

Digital City UK, a partnership between the council and two private companies, will give every resident free standard wireless access to the internet. Investment in the 1,400 secure access point 'Signal' will be recouped by offering upgrades for faster access offering higher download speeds.

The project was launched today as a partnership between the borough council and two private companies which will recoup their investment by offering upgrades and faster access at a yet to be determined price. However, every Swindon resident will receive free wireless access to all but the highest bandwidth internet sites.

Anti-virus software, and popular services offered by Microsoft and Google will be available on the network. Plans include potential delivery of remote CCTV services and real-time information on home electricity usage and air quality monitoring.

The mesh can also potentially provide free internet telephone calls, opening up new telehealth and telemedicine possibilities for the council.

Rod Bluh, Swindon Borough Council leader, said: "This is a truly groundbreaking partnership which will have real benefits for everyone living in Swindon.

"Not only will residents in the borough be able to access the internet for free; the council and its partners will be able to use the technology to provide cutting edge services to the areas or individuals who need them.

"Digital City will also provide the council with a unique funding stream and it is our intention to use our expertise to help other local authorities follow our lead."

Rikki Hunt of project partner, Avidity, said: "This is a fantastic opportunity for the whole of Swindon creating total social inclusion through our free service and, while others talk, Swindon is delivering a Digital City which will benefit both the public and business communities."

ContactPoint rolls out

The government is forging ahead with the introduction of ContactPoint to every English local authority, saying that recent trials were an "outstanding success".

Supporters of the long-delayed £224m project say it will make England's 11 million young people safer by providing a single register that can be used by all child protection professionals.

An evaluation report of the initial phase of the ContactPoint roll out, 'Lessons Learned from the Early Adopter Phase', states that early feedback from practitioners is good, with over 75% believing ContactPoint will be helpful in their future work. In one area a deputy principal has already been able to locate eight students missing from education for over a year using ContactPoint.

However the future of the project remains in doubt as both the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats have vowed to abandon it.

ContactPoint was developed in response to a key recommendation of the Laming Inquiry into the death of Victoria Climbié and has been designed to help frontline practitioners work across organisations, arming authorised professionals with a quick and easy tool to find out who else is working with the same child as early and as quickly as possible.

Privatise to survive: Councils are advised to prioritise spending and outsource more services. Councils, rather than Whitehall, should commission new partnerships that focus on mutual interests and pre-determined meaningful outcomes which can be achieved 'using fluid budgets', argue think tank, Localis, and KPMG. A new report, 'The Bottom Line – a vision for local government', states that such a move would allow services to be 'more personalised around the requirements of the end user'. Councils are advised to reassess their priorities against cost and innovate. 'If they are to achieve much needed expenditure reductions of around 20% by 2011' they will need to 'look long and hard at the services they provide and find new ways of managing them if they are to cut costs'. www.localis.org.uk

Birmingham chief hits out at barriers to total place: Radical reforms in public funding and governance will be necessary to make the 'total place' concept of integrated services a reality, says Jason Lowther, director of policy and delivery at Birmingham City Council. The city has identified seven barriers to organising services around individual citizens rather than organisations. Top of the list was "short term financial horizons" making it impossible to create a business case for early interventions. "We need to talk to Treasury about paybacks over a ten to fifteen year period," Lowther said.

ICT could reduce carbon emissions by 25%

ICT-based technologies have the potential to reduce carbon emissions by 25% in the G20 countries, compared with 2006 baseline emissions, says IDC.

The analyst has been focusing on where ICT can bring 'immediate benefit in reducing carbon emissions'. It believes that significant reductions can be made across all the sectors it surveyed: energy generation and distribution, buildings, transport, and industry. Technologies highlighted include integrating renewable energy into energy distribution using smart grids, ICT-enabled smart building systems, ICT-optimised supply chains, and variable motor controls in industrial machinery.

IDC's study focused only on technologies that are 'currently mature enough to be implemented within three years (given investment and government approval); have significant network and processing bandwidth requirements; and are standalone technologies, applicable to specific industries and usage patterns.'

www.idc.com/events/climate

Twenty million pounds is to be invested in innovative energy efficiency measures to cut emissions and energy bills in central government departments. The allocation is part of the package of £405m low carbon funding announced at the Budget in April to help establish the UK as a market leader in renewable technology and advance green manufacturing.

Sixteen English councils are set to reduce their energy bills by nearly £1m per year and cut their annual carbon emissions by nearly 4,700 tonnes after receiving the green light for their energy efficiency projects. The councils have been awarded nearly £4m in interest-free loans from the £51.5m Carbon Trust fund.

Crawley Borough Council is reporting substantial savings - averaging 11% on annual mileage per vehicle - across its Amenity Services Fleet thanks to live tracking and logging of vehicle movements over the internet via Masternaut Three X.

Videoconference to cut CO₂

Amey has cut 40,000 kilos of carbon emissions and saved £180,000 in its first year using Tandberg videoconferencing systems. VMeetings now enable staff to schedule virtual meetings and register attendees through its intranet. "Lots of people were driving long distances for fairly short, routine meetings," said Keith Sexton, Amey's director of health, safety, environment and quality.

