



NWDA to spend up to £30m on broadband infrastructure for Cumbria

The North West Development Agency (NWDA) is to spend up to £30m on broadband infrastructure for Cumbria.

The contract will be put out to tender in the next month and should be signed by summer 2003. The winning supplier will provide a managed service for three to five years, supplying 500kb/s links to private citizens, 2mb/s to businesses, and an e-government network connecting council buildings.

Under the agreement, users costs will be the same as if they were buying broadband in a metropolitan area, such as London or Manchester.

But the infrastructure is only part of the programme, and generating user demand will be fundamental, says NWDA head of IT policy Phil Southward.

'To get the take-up we will need more than just infrastructure, we will need a clear benefits package,' he said.

'At this stage we have to put the service in, and take the gamble that it will mature to the extent that the supplier will want to continue at the end of the contract.

'We can achieve a decent level of take-up in the three years, provided we work very hard on the content side.'

A team of 12 will focus on stimulating demand for the service.

And the agency will also work with content providers to raise awareness of broadband-specific applications, such as electronic invoice services for business and online buying or telemedicine for consumers.

'We know there are several content companies out there, and we have to assist them getting the software to the market by helping with advertising and awareness,' said Southward.