REPORT TO: **PLANNING & TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE - 17 OCTOBER 2005**

REPORT ON: **MICROCONNECT MOBILE PHONE ANTENNAE**

REPORT BY: **DIRECTOR OF PLANNING & TRANSPORTATION**

REPORT NO: **542-2005**

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 To advise Committee of the outcome of an investigation into the potential to install Microconnect antennae on the Council's street furniture and to seek approval to implement a scheme within Dundee.

2 RECOMMENDATION

2.1 It is recommended that the Committee notes the outcome of the investigation into the potential of the Microconnect system outlined in Section 6 of this report.

2.2 It is recommended that the Committee remits the Depute Chief Executive (Support Services) to conclude negotiations and enter into a contract with British Telecom for the installation of such a scheme in Dundee.

3 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

3.1 British Telecom propose to pay an annual maintenance fee for the use of the Council's street furniture for the proposed eight year period of the contract. The amount of this maintenance fee is subject to the number of structures ultimately used, but is unlikely to be substantial. Any income generated will be utilised to assist in the cost of the maintenance of the relevant street furniture.

4 LOCAL AGENDA 21 IMPLICATIONS

4.1 The proposed antennae system reduces the environmental and visual impacts of telecommunication equipment while also helping to address public concerns about any possible health implications associated with non-ionizing radiation. BT commits to follow the Mobile Operators Association ten commitments, which ensures that local sensitivities are reflected in a structured consultation process.

5 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS

5.1 There are no equal opportunities implications.

6 BACKGROUND

6.1 The Planning & Transportation Committee of 21 March 2005 remitted officers to work with British Telecom to investigate the potential to install Microconnect antennae on the Council's street furniture and to report back on the outcome of these investigations.

6.2 Members will recall that Microconnect is a new product developed by BT which is designed for use in sensitive urban locations. The system is in use in Cardiff City centre and is being deployed in Chester City centre. It uses a new approach to

traditional phone masts; normally a few substantial masts are used to gain the necessary coverage, but Microconnect uses a higher number of small low power masts to gain this same coverage. The system is designed for areas which have a concentration and critical mass of mobile communication needs such as the core of city centres. This system is designed to provide additional coverage and capacity for existing mobile service as well as enabling early delivery of 3G services in the city centre. This system also offers the potential for providing the infrastructure for further Information Communications Technology such as Wi-Fi (wireless internet access).

6.3 These low power antennae are typically around 350mm (14 inches) in height and are added to existing street furniture and have a minimal visual impact. Once a necessary location has been identified, the chosen piece of street furniture (usually a street lighting column or traffic sign) is re-engineered so that the equipment associated with the antenna is located within the column and the antenna is attached at the top of the column. Early indications suggest a system covering the city centre will require around twelve low power antennae to operate.

6.4 The BT Microconnect system has been independently tested and is below the requirements of the radio frequency (RF) public exposure guidelines of the International Commission on Non Ionizing Radiation Protection (ICNIRP). At full capacity the Microconnect system operates at 7 watts, which results in exposure at street level at least 100 times below the established guidelines set by the ICNIRP A recent independent report for Leeds City Council confirms that the Microconnect system results in a reduced overall exposure when compared with a conventional base station network.

6.5 Given the very small comparative scale of the Microconnect equipment, the general view is that they would be classed as 'de-minimis' and would not require planning permission. However, each proposed site will be examined on its merits and planning permission may be required if it has potential adverse implications for listed buildings or conservation areas.

6.6 BT normal approach is to consult widely to ensure that the sites for antennae are chosen with care and consideration for the local community, however, this will be made a contractual condition and BT are happy to agree to this. They also propose to undertake preliminary briefings and consultations with a wide selection of stakeholders to explain Microconnect and the likely nature of their proposed scheme before selecting potential sites.

6.7 It is proposed to enter into a contract with BT for the provision of this infrastructure. If approval is given to enter into a contract, negotiations will take place on matters of detail before it is finalised.

7 CONCLUSION

7.1 From the investigation work undertaken, it has been established that there are considerable potential benefits in introducing the system to the city;

a greatly improved signal coverage in sensitive areas of the city;
b minimal visual and environmental impact of the micro antennae;
c significantly reduced overall exposure to RF emissions below ICNIRP guidelines;
d strengthen the ability to fully utilise existing and emerging mobile technologies;

and therefore the Committee is asked to support its introduction in Dundee.

8 CONSULTATIONS

8.1 The Chief Executive, Depute Chief Executive (Support Services), Depute Chief Executive (Finance) and Assistant Chief Executive (Community Planning) have been consulted and are in agreement with the contents of this report.

9 BACKGROUND PAPERS

9.1 None

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MPG/MS 14 October 2005

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