

Big broadband boost for rural English shires and counties

- More than £22 million invested in government's Gigabit Broadband Voucher Scheme for rural areas
- 250,000 English homes and businesses eligible for boosted funding from 17 English councils

More than £22 million of additional funding is being invested into the UK Government's broadband voucher scheme, which subsidises the costs of building gigabit-capable broadband networks to hard-to-reach areas.

Gigabit-capable broadband enables internet download speeds of up to 1,000 megabits per second (mbps) – enough to download a HD movie in less than 30 seconds and lay the foundations for 8K-quality video streaming and virtual reality online gaming.

This new frontier in digital connectivity has the potential to revolutionise rural communities and make them more attractive places to live. It will give people who depend on reliable connections to work from home and keep in touch with family due to coronavirus, the freedom to live and work more flexibly and will help develop thriving digital economies.

Digital Infrastructure Minister Matt Warman is now urging businesses and communities to apply for the vouchers to future-proof their internet connections and be ready to reap the economic and social benefits brought by new advances in technology.

Matt Warman, Minister for Digital Infrastructure, said:

This government is determined to connect every home and business to the fastest broadband speeds available from the Highlands to the Jurassic Coast.

But we can only do this with collaboration at a local and national level so I'm delighted English councils have committed to pump more money into our voucher scheme to help rural communities get gigabit speed broadband.

"A quarter of all properties across the UK can now access these fast and reliable speeds, and we have earmarked a further £5 billion so rural towns and villages across the four nations can get the speeds they need to seize all the benefits of new technology."

The UK Government's Gigabit Broadband Voucher Scheme targets areas where the

cost of building new gigabit broadband infrastructure, which often requires digging trenches to lay full fibre cables to people's doorsteps, is likely to be too high for commercial operators to cover alone.

Since May 2019, vouchers worth up to £3,500 for small and medium sized businesses and up to £1,500 for residential premises have been available to cover these costs in rural areas across the UK.

Seventeen local councils in England have also provided £22.2 million worth of funding to top-up the values of the vouchers in their areas. At least 250,000 homes and businesses in the English countryside are expected to be eligible for this funding.

These include the Borderlands, Buckinghamshire, Cambridgeshire & Peterborough, County Durham, Derbyshire, Dorset, East Riding of Yorkshire, East Sussex, Hampshire, Nottinghamshire, Oxfordshire, Shropshire, Staffordshire, Warwickshire, West Sussex and Worcestershire.

Kent County Council also agreed to top-up the scheme for a second time, after providing additional funding back in September 2019.

Rural communities in Wales saw the value of their vouchers double in June, after the UK and Welsh governments announced they were working together to boost the scheme. The UK Government is also in discussions with the Scottish Government and the Northern Ireland Executive and local councils about the potential and approach for gigabit schemes there.

Almost 500,000 premises across the UK have been given access to gigabit-capable broadband since summer 2018 through a £1 billion UK Government funding commitment until the end of 2021.

Combined with industry investment it means 8 million premises can now access gigabit capable broadband compared to around 1.4 million premises two years ago.

Nearly 45,000 gigabit broadband vouchers, worth more than £90 million, have already been issued and there is more than £70 million worth of vouchers on offer immediately to take companies and residents in rural towns and villages out of the digital slow lane.

On top of this, the government has promised £5 billion to ensure hard-to-reach areas get access to gigabit connections over the next few years. Details on how this will be spent will be announced this autumn.

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Notes to Editors

- The Gigabit Broadband Voucher Scheme is a UK-wide, supplier-led scheme offering vouchers used as part of a group project, to pay towards the cost of installing gigabit-capable broadband to rural premises, i.e. homes and businesses, providing speeds of over 1,000 Mbps or 1 Gbps. Beneficiaries do not have to take those speeds and pay only for what

they want to use, knowing they can increase them over time. Anyone who is interested uses a postcode checker to find registered suppliers in their area. Their chosen supplier will guide them through the application. For more information and to check eligibility visit: <https://gigabitvoucher.culture.gov.uk/>