

# Big broadband boost for Scotland

- New agreement to join up the UK and Scottish Government's broadband voucher schemes to help rural areas get gigabit-capable broadband connections
- £6m to connect hundreds of public sector buildings across Angus, Dundee, and Perth & Kinross

A new collaboration between the Scottish and UK Governments will see voucher funding joined up to make more money available to subsidise the costs of building gigabit-capable broadband networks to hard-to-reach areas of Scotland.

Gigabit-capable broadband enables internet download speeds of up to 1,000 megabits per second (mbps) which is enough to download a HD movie in less than 30 seconds. It has the potential to make rural communities even more attractive places to live by giving people the freedom to work more flexibly and develop thriving digital economies.

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 across the UK.

The Scottish Government's supplier-led Scottish Broadband Voucher Scheme (SBVS) provides people with a voucher worth up to £5,000 to help deliver a permanent broadband connection to properties where there is no roll-out of superfast broadband planned.

To ensure even those in the hardest-to-reach areas of Scotland don't miss out on gigabit-capable broadband, the Scottish Government has teamed up with the UK Government to combine their funding and expand that pot to up to £8,500 for SMEs and up to £6,500 for homes.

The offer means eligible people experiencing the slowest speeds in some of the most remote areas of Scotland will be able to access a voucher that provides the maximum funding from both schemes.

Ministers from the UK and Scottish governments are now urging businesses and communities to apply to future-proof their internet connections and be ready to reap the economic and social benefits brought by advances in technology.

Matt Warman, UK Government Minister for Digital Infrastructure, said:

This government is determined to connect every home and business to the fastest broadband available. Our new deal with the Scottish Government unlocks extra funding to help rural communities benefit from gigabit-capable connections.

A quarter of all properties across the UK can now access these faster speeds and with more collaboration like this at a local and national level, we will see even more rural towns and villages staking their claim to these next-generation speeds.

Scotland's Connectivity Minister Paul Wheelhouse said:

We have been working closely with the UK Government to join up our respective funds and processes to maximise the impact of our respective voucher schemes across Scotland to add to progress achieved under the Digital Scotland Superfast Programme and augment our investment through our £600 million R100 programme. This collaboration will ensure that more people, communities and businesses in the hardest-to-reach areas in Scotland are able to access maximum funding available for better broadband."

UK Government Minister for Scotland, Iain Stewart, said:

The UK Government has been working closely with the Scottish Government and local authorities to ensure thousands of rural homes and businesses across Scotland have top-of-the-range broadband speeds.

Better connectivity is more important than ever, with many people relying on technology to stay in touch with loved ones and work from home as we navigate the coronavirus pandemic.

I encourage rural homes and businesses across Scotland to use the postcode checker on gov.uk to find out more information.

The move comes as almost £6 million for broadband across the Tay Cities Region is being released through the UK Government's Local Full Fibre Networks programme.

The first part of the project has seen £2.9 million of UK government funding awarded to BT to connect more than 150 schools, libraries and other public buildings in Angus and Perth & Kinross to gigabit-speed broadband.

This will be followed by further procurements to be completed shortly which will release £2 million to connect around forty public buildings in Dundee and £1 million for thirty more premises in Perth & Kinross.

The Tay Cities project is part of a strategy to bring gigabit-capable

connections to publicly owned and community buildings so they act as full fibre 'hubs' off which industry can build their networks to connect surrounding homes and businesses.

Alan Lees, Director of BT's Enterprise unit in Scotland, said:

Our world-class full fibre network will enhance Tayside's connectivity by bringing ultrafast broadband speeds to people and businesses across the region as well as underpinning the roll out of 5G mobile services. Digital technology is transforming every element of the way we live. In a world where everyday life and work increasingly depend on technology, digital skills can be the difference between getting ahead or being left behind.

**ENDS**

## **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/>.
- Information on the Scottish Broadband Voucher Scheme can be found here: <https://www.scotlandsuperfast.com/how-can-i-get-it/voucher-scheme/>. There is an online checker that will allow any property owner and/or tenant to enter their details and confirm whether or not they are eligible for a voucher through the SBVS.
- 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 more than 8 million premises can now access gigabit capable broadband compared to around 1.4 million premises two years ago. 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.