

Press release: Broadband Boost for Wales

- Up to £56m to become available to help take superfast speeds further across Wales
- Over 650,000 homes and businesses in Wales who would otherwise have been left behind have now been reached
- 95 percent of the UK will have access to superfast speeds by the end of the year

Up to £56 million is to be made available to help take superfast broadband to the most rural and hard to reach places in Wales, the UK Government has announced today (9 September).

The funding is part of a UK fund up to £645m announced today by Minister for Digital Matt Hancock.

Together with other planned delivery, it is estimated that this could see more than 900,000 extra UK homes and businesses gain access to superfast speeds after the end of this year, taking superfast coverage to 98 per cent of the nation over the next few years.

Minister for the UK Government in Wales Guto Bebb said:

Providing access to reliable, high speed broadband is probably the single most important thing we can do to ensure the sustainability of our rural communities and businesses. We know there is more to be done, but today's announcement of funding to take superfast feeds further than ever before, marks another significant leap forward in the UK Government's efforts to ensure Wales has a broadband network fit for the digital age.

Improved connectivity for homes and businesses is a cornerstone of this Government's efforts to create a stronger economy in Wales. Thanks to the investment made into Wales' digital infrastructure by the UK Government, we are well on our way to achieving a truly remarkable transformation in broadband provision across the nation. We are fully aware that this needs to be for all communities in Wales, regardless of how rural they are.

Minister for Digital Matt Hancock said:

We have now brought superfast broadband to almost 94 per cent of UK homes and businesses, and we are reaching thousands more every week. We are on track to reach 95 per cent by the end of the year, but we know there's still more to do. The money that is now being returned to the programme for reinvestment will help us reach that final 5 per cent, and is all part of our commitment to make sure that 100 per cent of the UK can get affordable, fast and reliable broadband by 2020.

The Government subsidised rollout has now reached more than 4.5 million premises around the UK, and new figures show more than 2 million homes and businesses have now signed up for superfast connections in areas where the Government has invested in broadband.

A clause in the Government's contracts requires suppliers to recycle funding when people take up superfast connections installed as part of the programme. Research published today shows this take up has been higher than expected and as a result, the major supplier, BT, has set aside £465 million to extend coverage over the full lifetime of the contracts – up from £292m in December last year – in nations and regions around the UK.

Combined with project efficiencies of £180m resulting from successful management and delivery of the programme, there will be up to £645 million available for local authorities to re-invest and take superfast speeds to those homes and businesses not already covered by existing plans. Of this, over £200m has already been committed to projects to extend superfast broadband.

Superfast connections of 24Mbps and above allow families to watch TV on multiple devices at the same time, or let children do homework while parents do online banking and shopping. The technology is ideal for many small businesses too, allowing bosses to run websites and buy and sell online.

This latest announcement comes hot on the heels of recent Government action to improve broadband speeds in the most remote places in the UK. In July the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport committed to introduce a Universal Service Obligation or agree a legally binding voluntary proposal by BT to help make sure that everyone in the UK has the connectivity they need for the digital age.

Note to Editors:

- Independent data from Thinkbroadband shows that currently over 93 per cent of UK premises are able to access superfast broadband and we expect this figure will reach 95 per cent by the end of this year. However, the latest Ofcom data available shows that only 31 per cent of premises have chosen to upgrade to a superfast connection.