

# UK and Welsh governments team up on big broadband boost for rural Wales

- Value of broadband vouchers doubled in Wales to help level up rural communities
- 50,000 rural homes and businesses in Wales are eligible to apply for topped up vouchers
- The vouchers subsidise the costs of installing next-generation, gigabit-capable broadband

Residents and businesses will from today have access to more funding for better broadband, as the Welsh Government “tops up” the UK Government’s Gigabit Broadband Voucher Scheme.

The scheme helps people with funding to cover the upfront costs of installing new gigabit-capable internet connections.

Vouchers worth up to £3,500 for rural SMEs and up to £1,500 for rural residential premises have been available in Wales since May 2019.

But, due to the Welsh topography, it’s proving more expensive for industry to roll out the infrastructure to some of the harder to reach areas of the country. The Welsh Government is now working with the UK Government to provide an additional £3,500 for SMEs and £1,500 for homes.

This means that the maximum funding available through each voucher has doubled and is now £7,000 for SMEs and £3,000 for residential premises.

The vouchers subsidise the cost of building out next-generation broadband infrastructure – such as fibre-optic cables – to rural villages and towns, so they don’t miss out on much faster speeds. They also incentivise other broadband companies to build in these areas.

Ministers from both governments are now urging Welsh businesses and communities to apply for these vouchers so they can future-proof their internet connections and be ready to reap all the economic and social benefits brought by new advances in technology.

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

Our £1.8 billion superfast broadband programme transformed Wales’ digital landscape, allowing many people to work remotely during lockdown.

We are now focusing on future-proofing internet networks with gigabit speeds and, working with the Welsh Government, I am pleased to offer even more vital funding to bring this next-generation connectivity to rural businesses and homes.

I encourage all those who qualify to apply to feel the benefits of much faster internet connections.

Deputy Minister for Economy and Transport Lee Waters said:

Fast, reliable internet is vital for our communities, as the covid-19 outbreak has highlighted. Following our Superfast Cymru programme 95 per cent of premises in Wales can access faster broadband, and we need to look at innovative ways to reach the final five per cent.

We are pleased to provide this top up for the UK Government's scheme which takes into account the challenges of reaching some premises in rural areas. I would urge communities and businesses to explore the options these vouchers will offer so they can access some of the fastest speeds available.

Gigabit-capable broadband enables internet download speeds of up to 1,000 megabits per second (mbps). Current superfast speeds are 30 mbps.

This next-generation connectivity has the potential to revolutionise rural communities and make them more attractive places to live. This will give people the freedom to live and work more flexibly and help develop thriving digital economies.

The UK Government is committed to delivering nationwide gigabit capable broadband as soon as possible, with the ambition to deliver it by 2025.

Before its gigabit voucher scheme, the UK Government's Broadband Connection Voucher Scheme helped more than 40,000 small businesses to achieve a superfast broadband connection from 2013 to 2015.

**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 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/>
- The Welsh Government also provided top up funding for the first phase of the Gigabit Broadband Voucher Scheme that was designed to encourage broadband service providers to build full-fibre networks in the UK for small to medium-sized businesses and nearby residents when part of a

group scheme. The £67m fund was successfully used over two years and has now closed for new applications. Any premises in Wales that were issued vouchers with the top-up allowance prior to the close-down date of 14 May 2020 will still receive their funding.