

£4.5m to help thousands in central Scotland get gigabit speed broadband

- More than 5,300 homes and businesses across central Scotland to get much faster gigabit broadband.
- Includes premises in Ayrshire, Edinburgh, Falkirk, Fife, Stirlingshire, Greater Glasgow and Lothian.

More than 5,300 homes and businesses in Ayrshire, Edinburgh, Falkirk, Fife, Stirlingshire, Greater Glasgow and Lothian will get access to gigabit speeds thanks to the first £4.5 million to be awarded from the UK government's nationwide gigabit programme.

These premises currently have slow speeds and were already due to benefit from superfast broadband through the Scottish Government's Reaching 100 (R100) programme, which is scheduled to invest £83 million in central Scotland.

But now, thanks to an agreement between the UK and Scottish governments the properties will get gigabit-capable full fibre broadband built directly to their doorsteps.

While superfast provides minimum speeds of 30 megabits per second, gigabit broadband delivers lightning-fast speeds capable of reaching 1,000 megabits per second.

The move will future-proof people's internet connections in these areas for the next thirty to forty years and allow them to take full advantage of cutting-edge technologies such as 8K TV and virtual reality streaming.

Matt Warman, UK Minister for Digital Infrastructure said:

The first pound to be spent from our £5 billion pot for gigabit broadband will be in Scotland.

That's because it is our mission to deliver lightning-fast next-generation internet connections to all parts of the UK as we build back better from the pandemic.

And this is just the start. Other areas of Scotland and the rest of the UK will benefit from our record investment in this national broadband upgrade and we'll announce more regions shortly.

Scotland's Connectivity Minister Paul Wheelhouse said:

The past year has demonstrated beyond doubt just how vital digital connectivity is across all areas of our lives – from health, wellbeing and education to social and economic recovery.

That's why the Scottish Government is investing £579 million in funding towards the £600 million cost of our Reaching 100% programme, building the infrastructure which, together with commercially-driven work, will ensure access to superfast broadband speeds to 100% of homes and businesses across Scotland.

The vast majority of connections being delivered to more than 120,000 premises through our investment in the three R100 area contracts – 100% in South, 86% in North and, now, 95% in Central – will be through fibre directly to the premises, delivering gigabit capability, providing connection speeds 30 times faster than our superfast commitment, and resilient, future-proofed connectivity for decades to come.

UK Government Minister for Scotland, Iain Stewart said:

It's great news that Central Scotland has been announced as the first area to benefit from the UK Gigabit Programme, and pleasing to see the UK and Scottish governments working together in partnership to level up communities.

The UK Government will spend more than £5 billion to help those in areas that need improved connectivity most. This will help us to build back better from coronavirus and create new jobs and economic opportunities.

Further information

The Scottish Government's R100 programme is in the process of ensuring that all homes and businesses across Scotland can access superfast broadband. The vast majority of connections will be gigabit-capable and delivered via full fibre cables built directly to premises – known as Fibre to the Premise (FTTP).

In Central Scotland there are some premises which were set to be delivered via Fibre to the Cabinet (FTTC) technology.

The UK Government has committed to delivering nationwide coverage of gigabit capable broadband through its £5 billion UK Gigabit Programme, with a minimum target of 85% coverage by 2025. The £5 billion will be used to subsidise building in hard-to-reach areas that aren't set to benefit from planned industry rollout.

On the basis that the UK Gigabit Programme would have to revisit these 5,368 premises at some point in the future to convert them to FTTP, the Scottish and UK Governments have agreed a technology 'flip' from FTTC to FTTP. This offers the chance to reduce build costs, enabling delivery of the connections earlier and at greater value for money.

The UK government will shortly be announcing further areas of the UK that

will be the first to receive a share of the £5 billion and be connected through the UK Gigabit Programme.

ENDS

Notes to editors

- The press office for the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport can be contacted on 020 7211 2210.

[UK charities join together to boost vaccine drive](#)

- Sixteen charities will work together to help save lives through the vaccine roll out
- Those with underlying health conditions and adult carers in cohort 6 encouraged to take up the jab
- Organisations will help promote access to important advice and information on vaccines

Organisations including The British Heart Foundation, Macmillan Cancer Support and Mencap are joining with the government and NHS to promote vaccine uptake among those the charities support every day.

Since 15 February those in cohort 6 – people with certain underlying health conditions and their carers – have been receiving invites from their GP practice to come forward for life saving vaccinations to protect them from COVID-19.

Working with the government on the UK's largest ever medical deployment, the charities will use the combined strength of their networks to reassure people with long-term health conditions about the safety and effectiveness of the vaccine.

Health and Social Care Secretary Matt Hancock said:

The incredible success of our vaccination programme has only been possible by working in partnership with the NHS, health and care professionals, local partners and our volunteers.

Having the support of the charities who work every day to support the very people we are reaching out to in cohort 6 is a great boost for the rollout which continues to show what we can achieve when we pull together as one.

Their help, encouragement and links with communities next in line

for the jab will help make sure everyone can get access to the life-saving protection the vaccine provides and help protect those with underlying conditions and their carers.

The organisations which have signed up so far to become members of the coalition are:

- African Caribbean Leukaemia Trust (ACLT)
- Asthma UK
- British Heart Foundation
- British Liver Trust
- British Lung Foundation
- Cancer Research UK
- Carers UK
- Diabetes UK
- Epilepsy Action
- Kidney Care UK
- Lupus UK
- MacMillan Cancer Support
- Mencap
- MS Society
- Sickle Cell Society
- Terrence Higgins Trust

These vital charities support those included in priority vaccination categories, including cohort 6 which covers individuals aged 16 to 64 with certain long-term conditions identified by the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation as being at higher clinical risk from COVID-19.

These conditions include chronic respiratory, heart, kidney, liver disease and neurological conditions, including MS and epilepsy, vascular disease, diabetes mellitus, immunosuppression, asplenia or dysfunction of the spleen, morbid obesity, severe mental illness, as well as sickle cell, lupus and those on GP learning disability registers.

Following the government meeting its target of offering a first dose vaccine to the top four priority groups by 15 February, all those in cohort 6 are now eligible to get the jab and should be receiving their invitation for their first dose.

Minister for Vaccines, Nadhim Zahawi, said:

The vaccine is our way out of this pandemic and offers the chance to protect yourself and others – that's why it's vital that people get their jab when called to come forward.

The rollout is a truly UK wide effort which is why having the support of these fantastic and trusted charities as we work to ensure everyone eligible gets their vaccine is so important.

I would like to thank them all for backing this life-saving

campaign and offering their expertise and assistance to support the largest medical deployment in British history.

Cohort 6 also includes carers who are eligible for a carer's allowance, or those who are the sole or primary carer of an elderly or disabled person who is at increased risk of COVID-19 mortality and therefore clinically vulnerable.

The charities will support the campaign by sharing content across their channels, including a new campaign video featuring people in cohort 6 getting their jab, and putting forward both those who represent the charities and those the charities work with to encourage others to take up the vaccine.

Chris Askew OBE, Chief Executive of Diabetes UK, said:

We are incredibly proud to be working with other leading voices in the charity sector to encourage people to get their COVID-19 vaccine.

People with diabetes have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic and have a higher risk of becoming seriously ill if they develop coronavirus.

For people living with diabetes, the best protection against coronavirus is to get the vaccine and take whichever vaccine you are offered.

People in group 6 who are at higher clinical risk from coronavirus and have not already been contacted will be invited for a vaccine by their local GP team.

Co-Founder and Chief Executive of ACLT, Orin Lewis, said

The ACLT feels compelled to ensure we do all we can to guarantee any decisions made regarding the COVID-19 vaccine, is done with knowledge of the verified facts and the science behind the vaccine.

Far too many lives have already been lost, however now there is a real opportunity for positive change especially on behalf of patients with immunosuppression systems linked to stem cell, blood and organ related disorders.

We feel extremely passionately people should seriously consider protecting themselves, their loved ones and society at large.

When they do make that decision, they need to ensure it's an informed one based upon verified facts and not myths, fears and taboos.

[The campaign video](#)

Sixteen charities have already joined the campaign and more are welcome to help boost the vaccine drive and save lives.

[Working towards a two-state solution](#)

- UK calls on Government of Israel to end demolition of Palestinian homes and allow delivery of humanitarian aid
- UK welcomes progress made in discussions of Ad-hoc Liaison Committee as well as progress towards elections in the Occupied Palestinian Territories
- UK reaffirms commitment to a two-state solution and calls for “work towards a better future for Israelis and Palestinians alike”

Remarks by Ambassador Barbara Woodward at the Security Council briefing on the Middle East (Israel/Palestine), 26 February 2021

Let me start by thanking the Special Coordinator for his briefing, and thanking Malak and Oren for sharing their personal reflections with us today – including on how to help foster peace and understanding among new and older generations alike.

In order to build trust between the parties and populations, unilateral acts must also cease. The UK has called on the Government of Israel to end the demolition of Palestinian homes and structures in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. The latest demolitions in Humsa Al-Baqai'a have again made this vulnerable Palestinian community, including children, homeless. We urge the Government of Israel to allow the unimpeded delivery of vital humanitarian aid. We also call on the Government of Israel to refrain from the destruction or confiscation of such aid once it's delivered.

The UK will continue to champion the rights and freedoms of women, young people and marginalised groups. We join Palestinian women, and all Palestinians, in rejecting the recent changes made by Hamas – the de facto authorities in Gaza – to travel arrangements from Gaza, which will limit Gazan women's independence and liberty. We call for this decision to be fully reversed, and for all parties to ensure greater freedoms and protections for women in the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

We are clear that the parties must work together to deliver meaningful improvements for Palestinians and Israelis. In this context, I'd also like to

welcome, as others have done, the constructive discussions held this week at the Ad-hoc Liaison Committee. We must now drive progress on measures that can alleviate the health and economic challenges in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. We welcome cooperation on vaccine access, and encourage the Government of Israel to facilitate the transfer of vaccines to the Palestinian Authority when required. We also need to see tangible and time-bound commitments from the parties to address long-standing barriers to development of the Palestinian economy. Progress against these issues will help foster an environment conducive to future peace negotiations.

Finally, I'd like to welcome the continued progress towards legislative and Presidential elections in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. As we have heard today, Palestinians need free and fair elections, as a pathway to accountable institutions, based on respect for the rule of law and human rights.

The UK remains committed to a two-state solution. We will continue to work with the parties to the conflict, to build the conditions for a permanent agreement. As our briefers today have made clear, we must work towards a better future for Israelis and Palestinians alike. A just and lasting resolution that ends the occupation and delivers peace is the best way to achieve such a future.

[Reflecting on international concern for Myanmar's people and a peaceful and democratic future](#)

Thank you, Mr. President, I would like to thank the Special Envoy for her briefing today, and also pay tribute to the powerful statement of my colleague the Permanent Representative of Myanmar.

The United Kingdom condemns the military coup in Myanmar and the arbitrary detention of members of the democratically elected civilian government, including State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi and President Win Myint, and civil society. We call for all those arbitrarily detained to be immediately and unconditionally released. We need assurances of their safety and wellbeing.

We stand with the people of Myanmar who are now bravely exercising their democratic right to protest this coup. Their wishes, and the result of the November 2020 General Election, must be respected.

The situation in Myanmar continues to deteriorate: peaceful protests are suppressed, peaceful exercise of freedoms inhibited by restrictions. Three protestors have died. We call on the military and the police to exercise

utmost restraint and respect human rights and international law. Firing live ammunition on unarmed protesters is reprehensible and must stop.

Three weeks have passed since Security Council members issued a robust, unified statement. Today's General Assembly discussion reflects the grave concern of the whole international community for the people of Myanmar and the country's peaceful and democratic future.

Mr President, I wish to make three points:

First, the international community, and the UN, has a vital role to play. We express our strong support for the continued efforts of the Special Envoy on Myanmar to secure a peaceful return of Myanmar to its path towards democracy. We call on the military authorities urgently to allow the Special Envoy to visit Myanmar to assess the situation first hand. Regional partners in particular have a critical role to play, and it is important that the UN engages with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and others, in progressing any solution. We welcome the ASEAN Chair's Statement of 1 February, and ASEAN's ongoing efforts.

Second, the military should face the consequences of their actions. As such, the UK has sanctioned 19 individuals in the upper echelons of the Tatmadaw, each responsible for serious human rights violations. We urge others to urgently explore the possibility of sanctions to deter further atrocities and encourage the reinstatement of democracy. The UK has conducted a review of our aid to Myanmar, to ensure that money does not support the military. We are also encouraging UK businesses to ensure that they are not engaging with military owned entities. We encourage others to do the same.

Third, it is vital that we do not forget the most vulnerable in Myanmar. Hundreds of thousands of Rohingya and other minorities continue to suffer, as they remain confined to their villages and IDP camps across the country. Notwithstanding the deterioration of the security situation in Myanmar since the coup, the international community and the UN should continue to encourage Myanmar to work towards creating conducive conditions for the voluntary, safe, dignified and sustainable return of Rohingya refugees from Bangladesh, in consultation with them. Additionally, displaced and vulnerable communities in Myanmar, including the Rohingya, as well as vulnerable host communities, should continue to receive humanitarian assistance. In this context, humanitarian agencies should have free and unhindered access to these communities.

I would like to conclude by reading an extract of a letter from the Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw, which represents the views of 380 democratically elected MPs. It reads, "Now is not the time for the international community to tolerate the actions committed by the military. We urge the United Nations and international community to support Myanmar's democracy and its people."

I thank the Special Envoy again for her excellent briefing and continued hard work.

Thank you Mr. President.

Health and Social Care Secretary's statement on coronavirus (COVID-19): 26 February 2021

Good afternoon and welcome to Downing Street for today's coronavirus briefing.

I'm joined by Professor Jonathan Van Tam, Deputy Chief Medical Officer, and Dr Susan Hopkins, Chief Medical Advisor to Public Health England and NHS Test and Trace.

Before I share some news on our vaccination programme, I'd just like to update you on the latest coronavirus data.

First slide please.

Today's ONS figures show that the number of cases is now down to 1 in every 145 people and that the rate of decline is continuing but actually the pace of it is slowing.

The rate of hospital admissions show a fall of 40% over the past fortnight, but there are still 15,485 people in hospital, and that's far too high.

The number of deaths have more than halved in the last fortnight, but 380 deaths were reported each day on average over the last week. And that is far too high.

The good news is that the link from cases, to hospitalisations and deaths, which has had a grim inevitability throughout 2020, that link is now breaking, thanks to the vaccination programme.

This demonstrates as you can see that there's been a fall in the number of cases, another fall, but that the speed of that fall is slowing slightly.

And this fact and the fact that the pressure on the NHS has lifted means that the UK's Chief Medical Officers have agreed that the UK alert level can be moved down from level 5, to level 4, which of course is great news. But level 4 still means the NHS is under serious pressure.

The number of cases is now falling by only 15% a week. In some areas that has flattened entirely. And one in five local authorities have seen a rise in cases in the last week.

I'm going to ask Professor Van Tam to set out more details of this and the

geography in a moment.

But I just want to say this about the figures. This stark picture shows this isn't over yet. The stay-at-home rules are still in place for a reason.

Every action that you take, every time you put your mask on, every time you stay at home – you are playing your part. This is on all of us to keep this under control.

This is still a deadly virus. We will get through this. But we have to stick at it. We must all remain vigilant.

Vaccination programme

And that brings me to the vaccination programme, because while the vaccination programme is rolling out at the pace of one of the fastest in the world, we're not there yet.

We can all take comfort that through science we have found a solution.

We have got a route out, and we can gradually replace the protection that is there in the restrictions, with protection that comes from the vaccine and that is very good news.

I'm delighted to be able to tell you that as of this morning, 19 million people have had the vaccine. That's 35% of all adults across the United Kingdom.

That also includes over half a million doses that were given yesterday.

It's easy for us to get used to these very large numbers. But that's 19 million people who now are starting to get the protection that we know comes from this jab, and we know that the jabs are saving lives right now across this country.

And of course the programme is expanding all the time.

This week, we're bringing 10 more major vaccination sites on stream, including Towngate Theatre in Basildon and Reading Football Club. And I thank everybody who is continuing this expansion of the vaccination rollout.

These join our network across the country of cinemas and cathedrals, and mosques and museums, and so many other places that have been converted from whatever they do normally into these life-saving centres, right in the heart of our communities.

And we've seen this incredible enthusiasm about coming forward too.

As my colleague, Derek Grieve, who heads up Scotland's rollout, told Her Majesty the Queen he'd like to 'bottle the community spirit' we've seen.

And I'm very pleased to tell you that today's ONS data shows 94% of adults say they've either received a jab or intend to do so. That is staggering.

It's really, really good news that there is so much enthusiasm for this job.

And it is testament to colleagues who have worked so hard to build the confidence in this job, and make it as accessible as possible to people, which is what we're constantly striving to do.

I'd like to give a shout out to Farzana Hussain, who is a GP in East London, who's been personally calling each of her priority patients, giving information about the vaccine and urging them to come forward and get jabbed.

I also want to thank the whole team in Coventry and Warwickshire, who have delivered the highest uptake in the whole country, giving first doses to over 95% of over-65s in their area. Thank you. It's an absolutely spectacular effort.

This work is so important, and it's important because the fightback against this disease rests with every single one of us.

And the more people who are protected, the safer we'll all be.

So if you get the call, please come forward, to protect yourself and to protect those around you.

Joint Committee on Vaccines and Immunisation (JCVI)

Now, throughout our vaccination programme, we've focused on protecting those at greatest clinical need. This is the final thing I want to turn to.

We offered a vaccine, for instance, to everyone in the top 4 priority groups by 15 of February, and our current target is to offer a first dose to everyone in the top 9 groups by 15 of April.

That's everybody who's 50 or over or part of an at-risk group.

Earlier this month, I asked the clinicians at the JCVI to set out what is the best order to offer vaccinations for the under-50s.

I asked them to make this assessment based on how we can save the most lives and prevent the most hospitalisations.

Earlier today, they published their [interim recommendations](#).

Next slide please.

The JCVI's clinical advice is that to save the most lives, once we have offered the vaccine to priority groups 1 to 9, we should take an age-based approach, and invite people to come forward in 3 further stages:

First, people aged between 40 and 49 years old, then 30 to 39, and finally, 18 to 29, who will become group 12.

This is the fastest and simplest way to roll out the jab.

Our moral duty is to put saving lives first. And that's what we've done.

So I can confirm that we will follow this clinical advice.

We will get jabs into arms as quickly as we can, in the clinically recommended order.

And once we've met the target, by 15 of April, we'll move onto these priority groups 10, 11 and 12.

I'm sure we all agree that the best approach is the one that saves the most lives.

So that's what we're going to do, together.

Conclusion

While we make great progress on vaccines, with one of the fastest rollouts in the world, we all though still have to hold our nerve and do our bit.

It's on all of us, still, to stay at home, protect the NHS and save lives.

And I'd now like to hand over to Professor Van Tam.