



NEWS RELEASE

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More funding to boost rural connectivity in the Borderlands

More funding is now available to help homes and businesses in rural areas of Cumbria and Northumberland get access to much faster and more reliable internet connections.

Vouchers are currently available in the Borderlands to subsidise the costs of bringing gigabit broadband to areas suffering with slow speeds.

As part of the £394.5m Borderlands Growth Deal, up to £4 million of additional Government funding will 'top up' these vouchers so even more money is available to improve digital connectivity and boost the regional economy.

The Government's Gigabit Broadband Vouchers Scheme (GBVS) currently provides up to £3,500 funding for eligible businesses and up to £1,500 for eligible residential properties to install gigabit-capable connections.

The £4 million made available will be used to match the level of funding available under the GBVS, so that eligible businesses can now apply for up to a maximum of £7,000 and eligible residential properties up to £3,000.

Gigabit broadband is capable of download speeds of 1 gigabit (1000 megabits) per second. The economic and social benefits of these high-speed internet connections are central to the Borderlands vision for the region and have been proven doubly important during the Covid-19 restrictions.

Businesses and residents in Cumbria and Northumberland are eligible to receive these contributions towards gigabit-capable connections if they are based in locations that are unlikely to benefit from commercial broadband rollout, or where available services are currently less than 'superfast' (superfast is defined as a minimum of 30Mbps download speed).



Residents and businesses can visit the Gigabit Broadband Voucher Scheme website at <https://gigabitvoucher.culture.gov.uk> to find a list of suppliers in their local area. Once you have made contact with a supplier, you do not need to do anything further and the supplier will apply for the relevant level of funding required to support each project.

Applications for the topped up broadband vouchers open today with a deadline to apply by 31 March 2021.

Gavin Keeble is a business owner in Sedbergh, Cumbria who has previously used a voucher to boost his broadband connection:

"The difference that the new service has made is completely cosmic. It has given us total peace of mind connecting to the outside world and running an international business from a beautiful and remote part of the UK and dramatically improved our business's professionalism and capability as well as transforming our family life.

"I love the fact that we have immeasurably better internet than all our friends and even people and businesses in central London. As the word has spread within the community, those who are not yet connected cannot wait for their transformation."

Digital Infrastructure Minister Matt Warman said:

"We are bringing gigabit-capable broadband to rural areas so they can reap the economic and social benefits of faster connectivity. Our voucher scheme is directly helping residents and businesses in Cumbria and Northumberland and I welcome this boost in investment through the Borderlands Growth Deal. It will mean more funding for people struggling with slow speeds and is an important part of our plans to level up the country."

Simon Clarke, Minister of State for Regional Growth and Local Government said:

"This Government remains committed to levelling up all parts of the country especially given the significant challenges communities have faced from the coronavirus pandemic. It's great to see another project which forms part of the multi-million pound Borderlands Growth Deal come to fruition.

"The £4m we've made available to the Gigabit Broadband Voucher Scheme project will help people and businesses access faster internet which will in turn allow them to flourish in a modern, global job market and unlock the economic potential of the region."



Cllr Stewart Young, Leader of Cumbria County Council, said:

“I’m pleased that this project is progressing well with the launch of the top up to the Gigabit Broadband Voucher Scheme. Improved digital connectivity is vital to support a range of the exciting projects included in the Borderlands Inclusive Growth Deal. I’d encourage all eligible residents and businesses to contact a supplier who will make an application for funding on your behalf.”

Cllr Peter Jackson, Leader of Northumberland County Council, said:

“This is a fantastic opportunity for businesses and residents in our area and sees us entering an exciting new phase in connectivity, following the completion of our previous superfast broadband scheme which saw an NCC investment of £26 million between 2012 and 2019 in rolling out availability to 94% of the county.

“We recognise that having widely available, high-speed, affordable and reliable connectivity to businesses and residents is crucial in maintaining our economic competitiveness and achieving social inclusion. We do hope all those eligible will take up this exciting offer.”

Cllr John Mallinson, Leader of Carlisle City Council, said:

“Connectivity is key to the development of our city and the wider region. I’m delighted to see this scheme is now in place and is being supported by the UK Government and local partners. We encourage local businesses and residents to get involved and take up the opportunities on offer.”

Ends

Notes for Editors:

- Funding will be granted on a first come first served basis, so it is important that businesses, residents and communities seek ways to work together to develop projects. Even with current Covid-19 restrictions many communities are already looking at ways to work together on projects to improve their digital connectivity using voucher funding.
- Telecom network engineers are key workers and will not need access to individual properties for connection until the end of each project; typically 9-12 months from its start.
- The top-up funding for the Gigabit Broadband Voucher Scheme will complement the existing Scottish Government’s Reaching 100% Superfast Broadband Programme, with both schemes ensuring that digital connectivity is being improved across the Borderlands area.
- The Borderlands Growth Deal was signed in July 2019, comprising up to



Borderlands

Inclusive Growth Deal



£394.5 million total investment in the five local authority areas on both sides of the border. The Borderlands Partnership consists of Carlisle City Council, Cumbria County Council, Dumfries and Galloway Council, Northumberland County Council, Scottish Borders Council.

- Up to £265 million is coming from the UK Government, £85 million from the Scottish Government and the remainder coming from the other local partners.
- The Heads of Terms deal sets out the suite of projects to be supported through the deal, which aim to accelerate economic development across the region, create jobs and encourage further investment in the area.
- All the proposed projects set out are subject to approval of business cases demonstrating value for money before funding is released.
- £4m is allocated for the top up, however the total amount spent will depend on the number of vouchers claimed by businesses and residents in the region over the course of the scheme.